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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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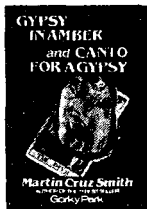


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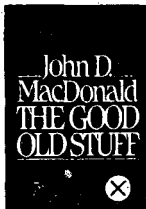
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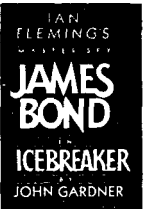
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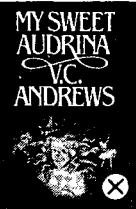
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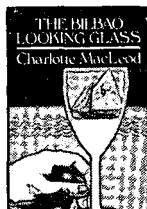
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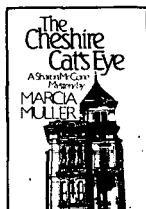
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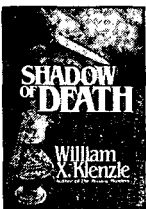
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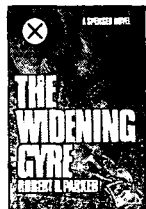
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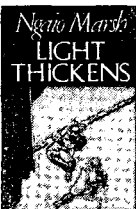
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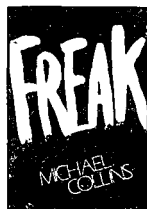
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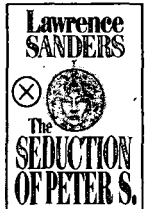
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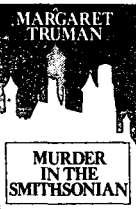
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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 29, No. 12, December, 1984. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at \$1.75 per copy January-December issues, \$2.00 special Mid-December issue. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario, © 1984 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. ROSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. **ISSN: 0002-5224.**

Cover by John Raffo

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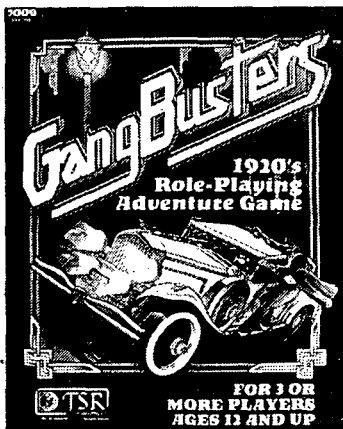
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

*by Cathleen Jordan*

About two years ago, in the November 1982 issue, to be precise, we used this space to comment on how one goes about submitting manuscripts to AHMM. Since then, a number of people have written to thank us for that information, and others who missed that particular column have given us reason to believe it would have been useful to them. We thought, therefore, that we'd go over the same material again in this issue, for those of you interested in such matters as story writing.

The principal point we'd like to make—and the one that seems to need saying most—is that no one who wishes to have a go at mystery fiction should hesitate to submit those stories to AHMM for consideration. That is, AHMM has always relied entirely on submissions by writers, known or unknown. Although many of its writers are "established," and have been publishing fiction for years in AHMM and in other magazines, we don't commission manuscripts from them or specifically ask them for stories. They come in the mail when their authors are moved to write

them, along with dozens of other manuscripts every week from dozens of other writers.

All those manuscripts are read—and some are bought. So don't, please, think you have to be asked for a story before one can be considered, or that you must have some sort of "credentials." Credentials are immaterial; it's the story that matters.

How to do the actual submitting? Nothing could be easier—there aren't many rules. The manuscript must be typed and doubled-spaced (not space-and-a-half), on one side of the paper, with your name and address at the top of the first page. Please don't put it in a binder or folder or staple it together; just a paper clip is what we prefer.

It should be mailed to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017. You don't need to include a cover letter, or to address the manuscript to anyone in particular; it will get sorted out here. With it you should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the manuscript's return in case we can't use it (for those of you who live outside the United States,

International Reply Coupons are available from the post office in lieu of stamps). If you'd rather have us discard the manuscript—assuming it's a photocopy, for instance—then you need only to let us know that and to include a letter-sized envelope, also stamped and self-

addressed, for the notification of rejection.

But all this talk about rejection notwithstanding, be assured that we do look forward to receiving your manuscripts, and that nothing pleases us more than the discovery of a new author!

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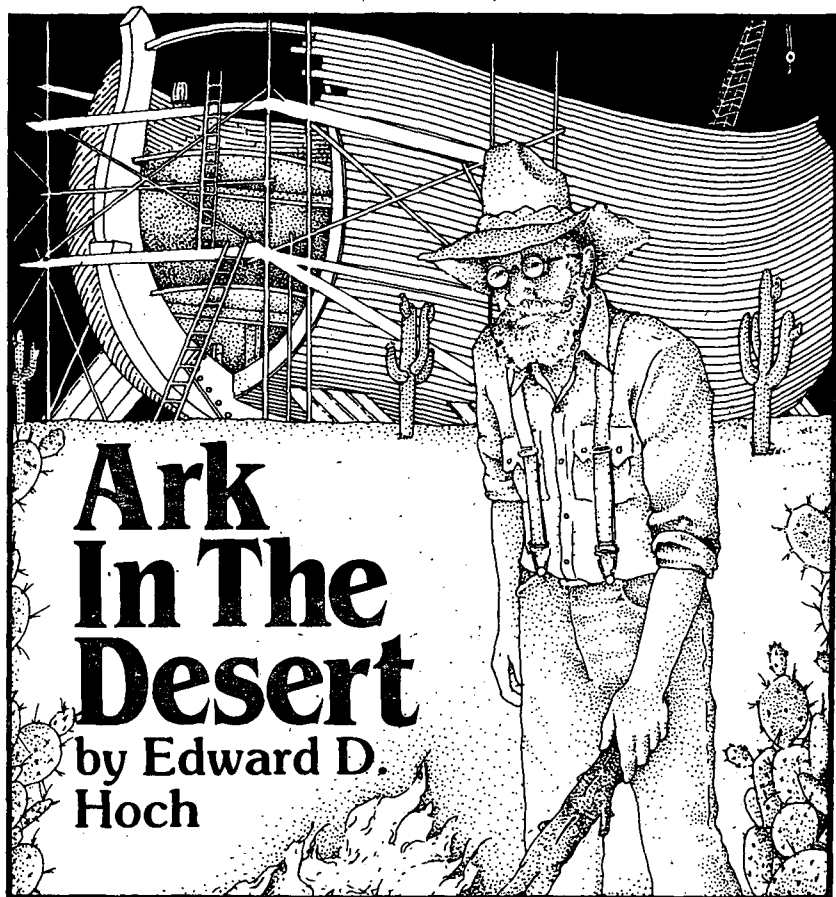
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**T**here was an odor of burning sagebrush in the early evening air, but Simon Ark and I could see no sign of smoke as we drove along the desert road.

"Someone is nearby," I said.  
"If we can find that fire, maybe

they can get us back on the right road."

Simon was quite stoical about being lost. "We have all the time in the world, my friend."

"Not quite. It'll be dark in another hour, and I don't feel much like spending the night

*Illustration by Glenn Wolff*

in a rented car in the middle of the desert."

It was in the desert that I'd first met Simon Ark, more than twenty-five years earlier, when I was a young reporter. He hadn't changed, but I had.

My publishing firm, Neptune Books, had sent me west to negotiate a film option on one of our best-sellers, and my old friend Simon had flown out with me. "A bit of vacation," he called it, "though flying to Southern California can hardly be considered a vacation in the true sense."

"I'll rent a car after I finish my business," I told him. "You said there was a ghost town in the desert you wanted to visit." Simon had wandered the earth for more years than I could imagine, searching for evidence of Satan and the supernatural.

"Yes indeed," he agreed. "It's somewhere near the California-Arizona border. I found a reference to it in an old volume about the Spanish missions."

And so we'd ventured into the desert as I'd promised. We'd found the ghost town, all right—converted into a bright and shiny tourist attraction with a five-dollar admission charge, ten dollars per carload. Simon looked it all over, more saddened than disgusted, and remarked on the way to the car, "Even ghost towns are turned

into something banal out here."

It was after we left the ghost town that we took the wrong turn and were soon hopelessly lost. "The route numbers would be on the map," I grumbled, "if these damned desert roads *had* route numbers."

"The odor of burning sagebrush seems to be getting stronger. We must be nearing some sort of habitation," Simon suggested.

"I certainly hope so."

Then, very suddenly, we rounded a curve in the road, topped a slight rise, and came upon an astonishing sight. Below us stood the hull of a large boat, under construction in the middle of the desert. A small cabin was nearby, and there we found the source of the burning odor. A short, bearded man stood over a pile of flaming sagebrush, feeding bits of scrap wood into the blaze.

I pulled up and parked the car just off the road. "Can you help us?" I called out. "We seem to be lost."

He tossed the rest of the wood onto the fire and came over. Up close I could see the strands of gray in his beard and the dim look in his eyes. I figured he'd lived alone in the desert a long time.

"Where you headed for?" he asked.

"Back to Los Angeles, I hope."



"Gettin' dark. Bad road at night."

"Once we reach the main highway—"

He shook his head. "You're over two hundred miles from Los Angeles. Better stay the night and drive back in the morning."

"Stay the night?" I must have looked puzzled. "With you?"

"No, there's a hotel a few miles away. They'll probably put you up. Just keep going along this road."

"Thanks."

I was about to start the car when Simon asked, "Is that a boat you're building? Where are you planning to sail it around here?"

"Not a boat, exactly. It's an ark, like in the Bible. I won't have to find the water. It's gonna come to me."

Simon and I both smiled. "You think the whole state's going to slide into the ocean after the big earthquake?" I asked.

"It's not the earthquake, it's the floods. I been thinkin' I should gather two of every animal, but all I've got so far is a couple of donkeys and a pet lizard."

We could hardly believe our ears. "What's your name?" I asked, holding out my hand to introduce myself.

"Seth Biglow."

"And this, coincidentally, is Simon Ark."

He smiled. "Happy to meet you both."

"How long have you lived here, Seth?" Simon asked, studying the man with his piercing eyes.

"Long enough. About twenty-four years now. Started as a silver prospector in southeast Arizona and worked my way clear across the state. I walked here, right through the desert. Never did know when I crossed the state line into California."

The ark itself was, so far, a long, windowless hull, without any deck or superstructure. To my unpracticed eye it appeared to be around eighty feet long and thirty-five feet wide. "Where did you get the lumber?" I asked.

"Mostly from the hotel down the road. They had some extra."

The idea of a hotel in the middle of the desert was about as bizarre as the ark. "Why do you expect a flood?" Simon asked.

"Fella on TV told me. He's on every night at nine with the warnings, and sometimes in the mornings, too. I suppose folks are building arks all over the state, aren't they?"

"Maybe one or two," I muttered. "We'd better go, Simon. It's almost dark."

But to my surprise he'd gotten out the other side of the car,

and was stretching his legs after the long ride. "We might linger a few minutes, my friend. In a half hour we can watch television along with Seth here." He was staring up at a pair of wires leading to the cabin.

"Why—?" I started to ask, and then decided to keep quiet. If Simon wanted to watch television, he had a reason. And if there was really a hotel down the road, we wouldn't have far to drive anyway.

Seth Biglow led Simon over to the nearly-completed hull and showed him some of the intricacies of ark-building. I figured the bearded man's age as past sixty, but he could have been younger. When, at a few minutes to nine, we finally entered the little cabin, it was completely dark outside. The cabin had electricity, which startled me a bit until I remembered the wires. There was a wooden table, a few uncomfortable-looking chairs, a cot, a small refrigerator, a closed cabinet holding the television set, some shelves for supplies, and a few books of varying sorts: *The Oregon Trail*, *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*, *The Magic Mountain*, and *An Outline of History*. No books on ark-building.

Seth snapped on the television and waited for it to warm up. "Your name is Biblical," I

remarked. "Seth was someone's son. Was it Noah?"

He grinned at me, and I saw he was missing a tooth. "Not Noah. Seth was Adam's third son."

The TV set flickered to life in the middle of a commercial. Promptly on the stroke of nine, the commercial was replaced by a head-and-shoulders shot of a solemn-looking man in a blue suit, seated at a desk before a map of the southwestern states. "That's him!" Biglow exclaimed. "Tall fella. Knows what he's talking about."

"This is Carl Windward, bringing you the latest update on the flood threat. Cities along the entire length of the Colorado River are being evacuated as flood waters sweep south. The California-Arizona border areas are expected to be especially hard-hit within the next forty-eight hours. Residents of the desert are warned to leave their homes and move away from the river. Stay tuned tomorrow for a further news update. We now join our regularly scheduled program, already in progress."

"See?" Seth Biglow said. "What'd I tell you?"

"He didn't suggest building an ark," I said.

"That was the first night, a week ago. He joked about it, but an ark sounded good to me. I

ain't leaving my land, even if I have to float above it."

"It's always best to be prepared," Simon agreed.

"What do you make of it all?" I asked Simon when we left. "Why did you want to see that broadcast?"

"There was no television antenna on the roof. If he was getting reception from Las Vegas or Los Angeles, it had to be coming by cable. One can send any sort of program over a cable—even a program meant for a single viewer."

"What sort of company would run a cable into the middle of the desert to serve one viewer?"

"A good question, my friend, although chances are the cable and his electric power both come from the hotel we're headed for."

Ahead of us I could see lights. "I guess that's it up ahead. I suppose this is where we'll spend the night."

A sign at the edge of the road identified it as the Golden Dunes Country Club and Spa. It sounded both expensive and exclusive—the sort of place one booked months in advance. But surprisingly enough, they took us in without question and gave us a large twin-bedded room for a reasonable sum. The glittery lobby was almost deserted, so

I could only assume it was the off-season.

We both slept well. I thought we'd be back on the road immediately after breakfast, but Simon had other ideas. Gazing out over the rich green of a regulation-size golf course he remarked, "The name Golden Dunes is quite inappropriate for this oasis. We must learn the secret of their success."

He stopped a bellman, who directed us to the manager's office. On the way we passed a balding man carrying a set of golf clubs.

"Marc?" I said by way of a tentative greeting.

He kept on walking.

"Who's that?" Simon asked.

"Well, I thought it was a fellow named Marc Glitzen. But I guess I was wrong. We did a book about him last year. He's a high-priced security consultant—sort of a corporate private eye."

"Interesting. Perhaps he's under cover."

"More likely he's here with a girlfriend and didn't want to be recognized."

The manager of the Golden Dunes was a slight, nervous man named Frank Foster. With his pencil-thin mustache and dark blue suit he seemed better acclimated to a Park Avenue hotel than a desert spa. "Yes, gentlemen?" He greeted us with

a proper smile. "How can I be of service?"

"My friend and I became lost after dark," Simon told him. "At my age, I was a bit fearful of spending a night in the desert. But a man down the road directed us here and we were more than pleased with the accommodations. Still, you certainly can't exist on the occasional lost traveler."

"Oh, no. We are a country club with full golfing and tennis facilities," Foster explained. "And also a health spa, ideal for shedding a few pounds."

"A fat farm?" I asked.

He looked at me with distaste. "Hardly that, sir. We do have exercise classes and steam rooms, but we're very low-key here. And very expensive, I might add. There are times when we're booked solid with conventions or sales meetings, but we try to hold a few rooms open for travelers like yourselves."

"Who owns the place?" I asked. "Some large corporation?"

"We're privately held. Now if those are all your questions—"

"One more," Simon interrupted. "Where does all the water come from?"

"Water?"

"The place is an oasis. That golf course alone must take a great deal of watering."

"Well, we're not that far from the Colorado River. The water is piped in."

"Ever have any flooding?"

"No, no—not in the desert. Why do you ask?"

"The man down the road is building an ark."

"That must be Seth Biglow. He's a bit eccentric. But of course the Colorado did spill over its banks last spring and summer. I suppose anything is possible." He waved a hand, dismissing the subject. "What else can I tell you about our establishment? Of course you'll be interested in the rates for membership. Here—take along this brochure. There's an application form attached if it interests you. I think it'll answer all your questions."

Back in the lobby I handed over the brochure to Simon. "Think we should join?"

"The place does interest me," Simon said, "but not for the reasons you might think. For instance, do you see that man standing by the registration desk?"

"He looks familiar," I admitted, studying the short, middle-aged man in sport shirt and slacks. "Where have I seen him before?"

"On television last night, giving the flood report."

"But—but wasn't that a network program? How did he

get out here so fast?"

"I suspect that segment was cut into the cable from this resort, aimed at one person only—Seth Biglow. They want to drive him from his land for some reason."

"Expansion?" I asked. "Couldn't they simply buy it from him?"

"Not if he won't sell."

I noticed that Marc Glitzen had returned to the lobby, still carrying his golf clubs. He seemed impatient about something. Presently he was joined by a blonde young woman with sharp but attractive features. They conversed for a moment in low tones. "You can page me on the golf course if you need me," he told her in parting. Then he stopped at the desk and was handed a small black pocket pager that would beep if he had a call or message. He waved to the young woman and disappeared down the steps to the terrace. He didn't look in my direction, and I didn't make another effort to say hello.

"If you really want to know what's going on," I said to Simon, "I could buy the girl a drink."

"She's much younger than you," he smiled.

"I'll meet you here in an hour," I said, and left him.

Having done that, I realized that engaging the young woman

in conversation and buying her a drink might be a more difficult task than I'd made it seem. For one thing, it wasn't yet noon and hardly a time for casual drinking. I strolled in the direction she'd taken and quickly found myself passing through an air curtain to the outdoor pool area. There I spotted her at once. She'd removed the wraparound skirt she'd been wearing and was lounging in a deck chair near the water. A paperback of a recent best-seller was in her lap, but before she could open it, I pulled up another chair and sat down beside her.

"Enjoying the book?"

"I've only just started it." She lifted her big sunglasses to squint at me. "Do I know you?"

"No, but my firm published that book in hardcover. I was interested in your reaction."

"You're a publisher?"

"Senior editor at Neptune Books in New York."

I gave her my name and she responded with, "Clair Sawyer. You on vacation?"

"More or less. I was driving through with a friend last night and we got lost. We'll be on the road again later today."

"Looking for authors in the desert?" she asked with a smile.

"No, but I saw you chatting with one literary figure—Marc Glitzen."



The smile froze on her face. "You must be mistaken. I don't know any—"

"The man you were just talking to inside. We published a book about his industrial security firm."

"His name is Markos, not Glitzen."

I smiled knowingly. "Is he on an investigation?"

"I'm sorry. You must be mistaken." She opened her book.

I tried a different approach. "Do you work for Mr. Markos?"

"Yes, but I don't see that it concerns you."

"Maybe it does. Confidentially, I'm here with Simon Ark, a private investigator. We're looking into a matter that may coincide with your area of interest."

"Simon Ark? I never heard of him."

"His investigations are not the sort that get newspaper headlines," I admitted. "But I'm sure your boss has heard of him."

"Just what do you think is our area of interest?"

I shrugged casually. "This place, of course. And old Seth Biglow."

"Who?" She seemed genuinely puzzled.

"The man who lives in the cabin down the road. The one who's building the ark."

"Are you on the level?"

I nodded. "I think we should pool our resources. Simon Ark and Marc Glitzen together could make an unbeatable team."

"I told you his name was Markos."

"Whatever."

"If you're serious about this, I could ask him to come in off the golf course and join us."

"Fine. I'll get Simon Ark. A little socializing by the pool shouldn't attract too much attention."

There was a house phone on the bar at one end of the pool. I waited with her while she phoned the desk. "This is Miss Sawyer. Could you buzz Mr. Markos on the golf course, please?"

"Certainly, miss," a male voice responded.

She hung up the phone and almost at once we heard a distant noise, like a loud firecracker popping on a summer's day. "What was that?" she asked.

"Could have been a plane breaking the sound barrier," I decided, scanning the sky for telltale jetstreams. "There's an Air Force base near here."

When I went back into the lobby to locate Simon, I found him staring out toward the golf course, where a large circle of people had gathered. "What is it, Simon? What happened?"

"An explosion. Someone was

killed. I believe it was Marc Glitzen."

When they brought the body back, his golfing partner confirmed that it was indeed Glitzen—or Markos, as he was known there. They'd been teeing off on the second hole when something exploded in Markos' pocket, killing him instantly.

The golfing partner's name was Tom Mullins; he was an insurance executive from Santa Barbara vacationing at Golden Dunes with his wife. He'd struck up a conversation with Markos in the bar the night before, and they'd agreed to try a round of golf together. Mullins had been slightly burned by the blast, but not seriously injured.

We had a glimpse of the body before they covered it. "Are you sure that's Marc Glitzen?" Simon asked me.

"No doubt about it. He was onto something and they killed him."

Simon bent with difficulty and closed his hand around a singed piece of paper that seemed to have fallen from the body. He slipped it into his pocket without examining it just as Frank Foster and one of the room clerks joined the group.

"What happened here?" Foster was demanding, his voice shrill with excitement. "We've

never had anything like this before! Did somebody throw a bomb at him?"

"It was in his pocket," Mullins said, and repeated his story.

Simon Ark touched the manager gently on the arm. "Perhaps we should talk. My friend and I may be able to shed some light on this matter."

"Whatever happened, it's not the responsibility of the Golden Dunes," Foster insisted. "An outside act of violence—"

"It might very well be your responsibility," Simon said. "I suggest you speak with us in private."

Someone had called the police, but since the nearest town was twenty miles away, we knew it would be a while before they arrived. Meanwhile I scanned the gathering crowd for some sign of Clair Sawyer, wondering if she'd been informed about her boss's violent death. Then, as we followed Foster into his office, I caught a glimpse of her. She was talking on the telephone, her back to us, and although I couldn't see her face, I was certain from her stance that she knew.

"All right," Foster said, settling behind his desk. "What's this all about? The police will be here in a quarter hour, and I want to know what you meant about the Golden Dunes being involved."

"Shortly before the explosion that killed Mr. Markos, my friend and I noticed him in the lobby. He was obtaining a pocket pager from your front desk—one that would beep to tell him if he had a call. We saw him put it in his left-hand pocket, and that was the site of the explosion. I think the blast was triggered by a radio signal sent from your front desk, in response to a phone call from a woman assistant of Markos."

"Impossible!"

"We were with the woman when she made the call and asked that he be paged. The sound of the explosion followed at once."

"If what you say is true, she could have planted the bomb on him."

"As I said, Mr. Foster, we saw him get the pager unit at your desk."

"Come with me," he said. "We'll see about that right now."

The scene in the Golden Dunes lobby had grown tumultuous as word had spread among the rest of the guests and staff. They stood talking in small groups, waiting for the next act of this unexpected tragedy. Foster headed straight for the reception desk while we trailed behind. I recognized the clerk on duty as the same one who'd handed the beeper to Glitzen.

"Kent, did Mr. Markos check

out his pocket pager unit?"

The slim, mustached clerk nodded. "Yes, he did, sir. Just before he went out."

Simon Ark leaned his bulk on the counter. "Did you choose which pager to give him?"

"Oh no! They're all numbered, and assigned to each guest on arrival. Otherwise we'd have to adjust the beeper frequencies daily. That unit was assigned to Mr. Markos for the length of his stay. He left it here when he wasn't on the golf course, simply so he wouldn't have to carry it around."

"And it was labeled with his name?"

"With his room number. Room 545."

Simon nodded. "So anyone could have tampered with it during the night—or even substituted an identical unit."

"I suppose so," Kent admitted.

I could hear a siren in the distance, growing closer. The police were finally arriving.

Since the Golden Dunes area was not part of any town with a police force, the California Highway Patrol took charge of the initial steps in the investigation. Simon seemed reluctant to speak with them, and suggested we go for a drive.

"Where's there to drive to?"

I asked, a bit bewildered.

"Let's see how Seth Biglow is progressing with his ark."

The bearded man was doing quite well. He was nailing the last of the timbers along the side of the hull as we drove up. "How can you work in this sun?" I asked.

"Easy, when you're used to it. Besides, I have to hurry. The TV says the water's rising. The flood'll hit here by tonight. There was a special report this morning."

I saw that the deck portions were partially assembled, ready to be lifted into place. "You think it'll be seaworthy by tonight?" I asked.

"Got to be. I'm not leaving my land."

We watched while he finished the side and used a powerful winch to hoist the first of the deck sections into position. For the first time, I really believed he would finish it. He'd be ready, for the flood that would never come.

"At least Noah waited for the word of the Lord," I commented as we left Seth Biglow's cabin and drove back to the Golden Dunes.

"Seth had the word of television, the Lord of our times for some people."

"Why do they want him off his land, Simon? Is it connected with Glitzen's murder?"

"Almost certainly it's connected. We just don't know how." He remembered something and reached into his pocket, taking out the scrap of burned paper he'd picked up near the body. On it we could make out a single handwritten word.

*Steal*

"Steal? Someone's going to steal something?"

"Note the capital letter," Simon instructed me. "And the last letter running off the charred edge. Perhaps it's some other word or name beginning with 'Steal.'"

"Do you think it's the key to the mystery?"

"I think Clair Sawyer is the key to the mystery."

We found her back at the Golden Dunes, in her room. When she answered the door, we could see an open suitcase on the bed. "We're sorry about your employer," I said. "Simon and I wondered if there was anything we could do."

"No, thank you. I'm getting ready to leave."

"I'd like to speak to you first," Simon Ark told her. "May we come in?"

"Well—" she hesitated. "Just for a minute."

The room was much like our own, with two chairs in addition to the bed. I sat on the edge

of the bed while Simon took one of the chairs. Clair Sawyer remained standing as she finished the last bits of packing. "You're leaving?" Simon asked. "The job is done?"

"What job?"

"Or will others be taking over for you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Mr. Markos was here on vacation."

"You killed him, you know," Simon told her bluntly.

The words had the desired effect. She sat down on the bed, the color draining from her face. "I didn't—"

"Your phone call set off the explosive charge in his beeper. You could have done that deliberately. You might have taken the job with Markos—or Glitzen—to spy on him."

"That's ridiculous!" she insisted, beginning to recover her composure.

"And what about Carl Windward? Is he part of your team, too?"

"Who?"

"Windward. He does a television newscast every night at nine, for a very limited audience."

"I never heard of him," she said.

I joined in. "He was in the lobby this morning. We saw him."

She seemed to consider that,

and finally she said, "Maybe it's time we did pool our resources, gentlemen. I know who you are, Mr. Ark. Washington has a rather complete file on you. Your beliefs and methods may be strange, but I'm told you get results."

"Washington?" I repeated, completely bewildered.

"You fellows had it a bit wrong. I wasn't working for Marc Glitzen. He was working for me." She opened a hidden flap inside her purse and produced an official-looking plastic I.D. card.

"What's Washington's interest in the Golden Dunes?" Simon asked. "And why did you hire Glitzen?"

"I hired him to get results, and I'll hire you for the same purpose, Mr. Ark—if you're for hire."

"I'm not."

"You won't find the Devil in the desert, but you may find something just as dangerous. For the past several weeks, a team of top Russian technicians have been slipping across the Mexican border, bound for this general area. We want to know what they're after."

"Spies? Terrorists?"

She shook her head. "I said technicians. If they were anything more dangerous, we'd have them locked up by now. But what have they come for?"



I hired Glitzen to check on the ones staying here at the resort, to follow them and see where they went."

I had an idea. "That other golfer, Mullins! I'll bet he was one! And maybe he set off the bomb himself."

"I don't know who they were," Clair Sawyer said. "But Glitzen found out too much and they killed him."

"Why did you choose Glitzen for this?" Simon wondered.

"He'd done government work before, and he was expert at the type of surveillance we needed here." She gave a wry smile. "You understand that Congress has placed restrictions on my agency's activities within the United States. There are times when we must hire others to do our work."

"That's hardly obeying the letter of the law," Simon remarked.

But before she could answer, the telephone rang. She picked it up and listened carefully, frowning as she spoke in monosyllables. "Right away," she finished and hung up.

"What is it?" Simon asked.

"Our deal is off. It's too late for your help now, Mr. Ark."

"If you could tell us—"

"A plane has disappeared from the air base near here."

"Disappeared? How does a plane disappear?" I asked. "Do

you mean it crashed?"

"I can't say any more. I have to go."

She was almost out the door when Simon Ark stopped her with a single word. "Stealth."

"What?"

"You heard me."

"What do you know about Stealth?"

He took the charred scrap of paper from his pocket. "Glitzen had this on him when the bomb went off. I read the papers, too, and I know that Stealth is the name of a new class of bombers. They're undergoing development and testing right now. When you said a plane was missing, I remembered the word, or part of a word, on this paper."

"How did it disappear?" I asked.

"On a test flight this morning. In broad daylight."

"Couldn't they track it on radar?"

"The plane is invisible to radar," she said with a sigh. "That's the point of it. This was a specially converted F-111A, designed to test the Stealth system we'll be using later on bombers."

"Seth Biglow!" I said suddenly. "They wanted him off his property so they could land the plane there! And if he won't get off, they'll kill him!"

"We'd better get back there," Simon agreed.

"I'm going with you," Clair said.

We were in the car, heading back down the desert road, within five minutes. "Tell me about this man Windward," Clair asked as we drove. "It's the first I've heard of him."

"We saw him this morning at the Golden Dunes," Simon explained, "but I haven't seen him since. He telecasts a false report of impending floods which is fed into the cable for Seth Biglow's television set. Apparently the motive was to get the old man to flee his land, but instead he's been building an ark."

"An ark! In the desert?"

"We gather he's lived on his land for many years. He doesn't want to leave."

"You're sure he's not imagining these news reports?"

"We saw one ourselves," I told her. "Last night at nine. This Windward guy was on the screen, big as life, warning about the flood. And Biglow says he was back this morning."

We topped a rise on the desert road and saw the familiar cabin ahead of us. The bearded Seth Biglow was standing high on the deck of his ark, hammer in hand. He put it down as we approached and waved to us. The donkeys stood nearby.

"How are you coming?" I called.

"Fine! Just finishing up. Let the rains come."

Clair Sawyer looked on in amazement. "You mean he built this big thing for himself and those two donkeys?"

"He's got a lizard, too," I told her.

But Simon's expression had suddenly changed. "Too big! Too tall! What fools we've been!"

"Fools?"

"He hasn't been building an ark at all."

"Simon, if it's not an ark, what is it?"

"A box."

That was when I saw the gun suddenly appear in Seth Biglow's right hand. He was taking aim at Simon when I heard the sudden crack of a pistol just behind me. Clair had fired once through the side of her purse, catching Biglow in the chest. He toppled off the ark as if in slow motion, hitting the ground in front of us.

It was Simon who peeled away Biglow's false whiskers and wig to reveal the face of the missing newscaster, Carl Windward.

"I don't understand any of it," I told Simon and Clair. "How could Windward be Biglow? And where's the missing plane?"

"The plane is inside the ark, of course. It was constructed solely for that purpose—as a

box, a crate, a container."

"Look, I'll admit the ark is pretty big—more than eighty feet long and maybe thirty-five feet wide. But a plane's wingspan would be wider than that."

"Not this plane," Clair explained. "The F-111A is what they call a 'swing-wing' fighter. The wings can be angled quite close to the sides of the plane for supersonic flight."

"You're telling me the missing plane is in there right now?"

Simon Ark smiled. "Let us climb up on deck and see."

We left Biglow's body where he'd fallen and climbed the ladder to the top of the ark. I looked through the single hatch at the dark interior and saw the sun reflecting off the plane's aluminum body. "Amazing!" was all I could say.

Simon nodded. "When Miss Sawyer commented on its size; I knew she was right, of course. Why would Biglow go to the trouble of building such a large ark when a much smaller vessel would have filled his needs? Why did he need that powerful winch we saw him using? Why were the deck sections assembled on the ground and lifted into position? And why were there no windows in the vessel?"

"The winch was used to lift the plane into the ark, before the deck was put on," Clair rea-

soned. "And of course they didn't want windows."

"They?" I repeated.

"I imagine the Russian technicians appeared after dark, to help with the building. It was obviously too big a task for one man," Simon pointed out. "That's something else we should have realized at once."

"And there'll be the pilot of the plane, too," Clair said. "I imagine they paid him a great deal of money to land it here."

"But it's only a few miles from the Golden Dunes," I argued. "Weren't they taking a chance on someone seeing them?"

"That rise in the road blocks direct view. And I suspect they put up detour signs while the plane was actually being hoisted inside the ark. It's a back road anyway, not the main route to the Dunes."

"Were they going to ship this thing back to Russia?"

"Hardly," Simon told me. "They brought the technicians in because the work all had to be done here. They just had to keep it hidden for a day or two while they looked it over. Then they could burn it up in some remote desert area where the Air Force might think it had crashed."

"But how did you know?" I demanded.

"Biglow kept a copy of *Jane's*

*All the World's Aircraft* in his cabin. Odd reading matter for an ex-pro prospector turned hermit, but of course he needed the dimensions of the plane to build his ark. He told us Windward was a tall fellow—something he couldn't possibly have known from those head-and-shoulders television shots. And, of course, when we saw him in the lobby, he wasn't tall at all. Biglow described him as such simply to make him appear much different from himself."

"But the TV broadcast—"

"A video tape he surreptitiously turned on when we settled down in front of his set. I imagine we'll find the tape machine inside that cabinet under the set."

"Why did he shed his beard and appear in the Dunes lobby this morning?"

"Glitzen had found out about the Stealth somehow—probably from one of the Russians. Biglow had to remove him from the scene by substituting a pager with an explosive charge in it. It was easy enough to do in that busy lobby, but he could hardly show up there in his Seth Biglow persona. He removed the disguise and we recognized him

as Windward—though, of course, no one else did."

"What if I hadn't had Glitzen paged when I did?" Clair asked.

"I'm sure Biglow planned to make the call himself. You just beat him to it."

When government agents and Air Force security teams arrived to take charge, they found the plane's pilot and some Russian technicians hidden inside the ark, where they'd been trapped by our arrival. Clair Sawyer stayed to help with the investigation, but it was time for Simon and me to be on our way home.

On the drive back I asked, "What made Biglow do it, after all those years in this place?"

"Oh, I imagine the real Seth Biglow is buried somewhere out in the desert," he said. "I knew from the very beginning that the man we spoke to wasn't any desert prospector. He told us he walked here through the desert from Arizona, that he didn't even know it when he crossed the state line. But the Colorado River is the state line, and one could hardly cross that without knowing it."

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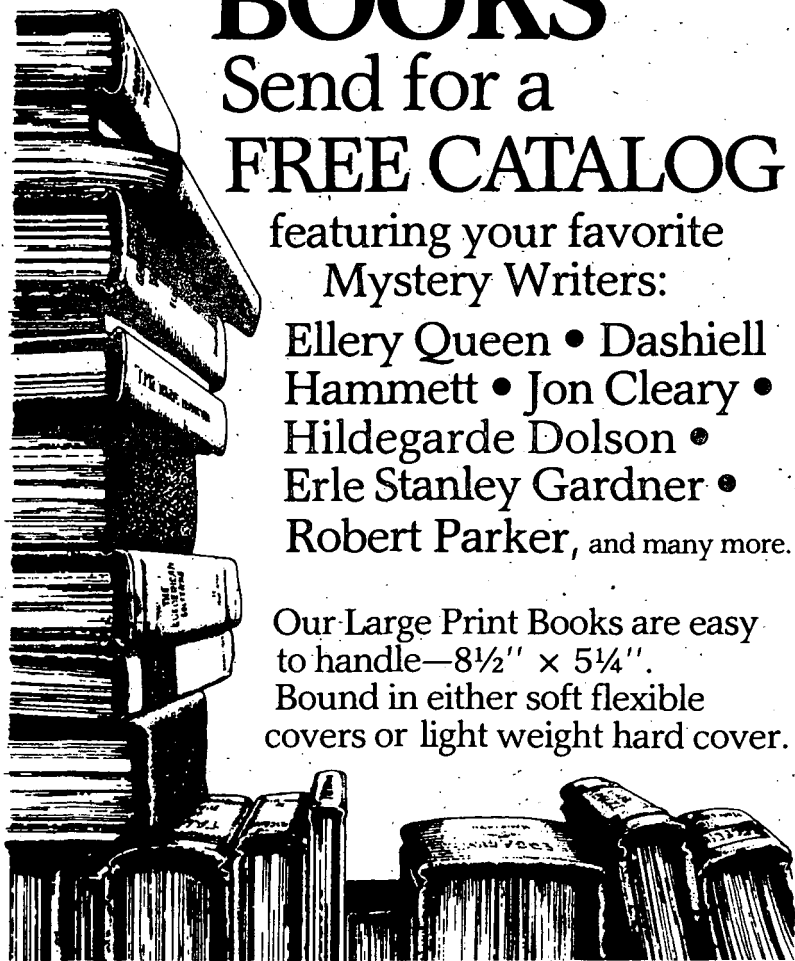
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FICTION

# Toasted Onions

by Augusta Hancock



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

24

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Minnie Willaby, seventy-three, drove every day to the grocery store in an elephant-colored, elderly automobile. Locals and regular summer people knew to get out of the way as much as the narrow roads allowed whenever they saw her coming. Tourists and casuals quickly learned to do so.

Minnie was an eccentric and always had been. At seventy-three, she was only slightly more flighty and odd than she had been in her younger years. She dressed like a scarecrow, and on rainy days, she wore a yellow southwester and full-gale gear. She had been a pretty young woman; she still had a pretty face, which now looked a little strange on her elderly body.

She was not exactly "Miss Willaby," for she had had several husbands briefly; her acquaintances—perhaps even she—had lost track of the exact number. The husbands had not made much difference in her or in her life. They were all young, handsome, mildly greedy, somewhat exotic, and of no particular character. The first husband, whom she had married when she was sixteen, had been her father's chauffeur. The marriage had lasted exactly as long as it had taken her father to annul it.

She had been coming to the cottage on Cormorant Point since she was an infant. The "cottage," although uninsulated and unheated, was a rambling Victorian pile with turrets, towers, open porches, several sitting rooms, seven bedrooms, and a bath. Deep in the spruce woods two hundred feet behind the cottage was a small guest house, built for unwanted relatives and placed as far away from the cottage and the sea view as was possible. No one used it now, and only one person used the cottage, Minnie herself.

The cottage and guest house had been built by Minnie Willaby's grandfather, who had made money in a Massachusetts textile mill. Minnie's father had managed to dispose of much of his father's fortune, and her elder brother had got rid of most of the rest, the former through extravagance, the latter through incompetence. Minnie no longer had funds for the traveling she used to love when she was younger—mostly to Mexico in the winter, and to Italy and Spain in the spring—but she still had a comfortable apartment in Boston and the cottage on Cormorant Point, and she still told stories of her adventures in foreign lands. She had a feeling for adventure.

Her summer grocery shopping had attracted considerable local attention, for she went to the store each day with a shopping list for a different letter of the alphabet. On her first day at the cottage,

she bought items beginning with "A": allspice, alum, ammonia, apples, and, as available, artichokes, asparagus, and aubergines. On the second day, her list included bacon, baking powder, beets, bouillon, and bread. The system was not entirely rigid, however. I, J, and K, for example, were done on the same day. On a B day she could buy beef, while on an M day, she could buy meat (as well as macaroni, meal, milk, and mushrooms). Cleansing powder could be bought on a C or P day, but also on an A (Ajax) or B (Bon Ami) day. To play with the variations gave her great pleasure. She had a particular weakness for sweets, and would work them into her list in various ways. People who did not know her (and even those who did) were startled to see the tall, thin vision in floppy garments laughing delightedly when she discovered a new or forgotten brand name that would allow her to buy cookies or candy on a non-C day. The list itself was alphabetical, so she would go back and forth in the store, picking up items in alphabetical order, rather than in the order of the store's layout. She pushed her cart over the somewhat uneven floor with the same abandon with which she drove her car.

One fine July morning, Police Chief Tom Lawson was on his way back from investigating a family fracas when he spotted her car in the road ahead. His friend Wimbledon Jones, vacationing private detective, was riding with him. They were on a stretch of road that, like a rollercoaster, climbed to wooded hilltops, then dipped down into the hollows, where coves reached in and gave a quick view of the sea.

"Oh-oh! That's Minnie Willaby's car at the top of the next hill," Tom said. He approached the rise very slowly. The car stood at the top, half off the road. Tom went by carefully, then stopped in front of it. There was no one in it.

"That's funny. I wonder what she took into her head this time." He got out and walked back, looking automatically at the tracks in the dirt stretch in front of Minnie's car.

"I hope we don't really have to look for tracks," Wimbie said, as he joined Tom. "There sure are a lot of them."

On the back seat of the car were two large bags of groceries. The keys were in the ignition. Tom got in the car and started it. He backed it up a little, then ran it forward, moving it out of the road as he did so.

"Nothing wrong with the car as far as I can see." He looked around. There were no houses on that stretch of road. "Let's wait

a few minutes. Maybe she had to go into the bushes."

They sat in the police car, with the sun warming them through the windshield. Tom was tall, gray, and neat; Wimbie, shorter, looser, slumping. After a few minutes, Tom got out and called her name. A gull answered.

"We'd better have a look around. Can you take that side of the road?"

They walked through the bushy growth of alders, then met back by the cars. There was no sign of Minnie Willaby.

"Minnie's just peculiar enough to have left the car here in the middle of the road and walked home. Her house is only a little way along. But what about the groceries? I guess the least we can do is to get them home. Would you mind driving the Elephant?"

Tom took a sheet of paper and a piece of string from the glove compartment of the police car and wrote a note: "Minnie Willaby. We've taken your groceries home. Tom Lawson." He tied the note around a small tree at the top of the hill.

Tom, in the police car, followed Wimbie and the Elephant. An oncoming car, seeing Minnie's vehicle, pulled off on the far side of the road. Wimbie saw the open-mouthed driver as he passed. Turning into Minnie's stony driveway, Wimbie glanced at the rough track that led to the guest house; then he went on down the steep hill toward the sea, where the cottage looked out over a wide view of water with a sprinkling of distant islands. He stopped in front of the house, and as he took the key out of the ignition, he saw a grocery list on the floor. He picked it up and then examined the keyring. There was a house key on it. As he got out of the car, he held the key up toward Tom, who had pulled in behind him.

The house looked closed and quiet. Tom's heavy shoes thumped on the wooden porch. He knocked loudly. There was no other sound except the lap and swish of the incoming tide beyond the rocks. Wimbie had brought the grocery bags to the porch. Tom opened the door with the key, and they went in.

"Miss Willaby! Minnie!"

Silence.

They set the bags down in the kitchen. There was an old fashioned stove and sink, a large modern refrigerator, and a very well-stocked pantry.

"I don't suppose there's a clue in this bag of groceries," Tom said. "That's sure a lot of food for one person. I suppose Nellie White eats lunch here when she cleans. Still, it's a lot when you consider

that Minnie goes to the store every day. It looks like a C day. I see cabbage, cauliflower, and coconut on top."

"Yes. Here's the list. All C's."

"She must be starting on the alphabet the second time around."

"Do you suppose she was expecting company?"

"She doesn't have much company. I don't recall any for years. There used to be an occasional young man, but I haven't heard of one for a long time."

"I guess more food begins with C than any other letter. Do you suppose she was compelled to buy everything she could think of beginning with C?"

"It's just our luck to have her disappear on a C day. Let's check these things against the list. I don't guess it'll tell us anything, but it's something to do."

Tom began to take the items out as Wimbie looked at the list. Most items had been checked off. Wimbie double-checked.

"Okay, we've got the things on top," Tom said. "Then carrots, chipped beef, cream, clams, cornflakes, crackers, chicken, corn, celery, crabmeat, coffee, and cocoa. That's this bag."

"She's got calf's liver, chicory, and chives on the list, but they're not checked off. The store must not have had any. Coriander's not checked off, either. They usually have coriander."

"Over here we have cupcakes, cold cuts, cole slaw, chocolate cream cookies, chocolate chip cookies, coconut cookies, cream of tartar, Coleman's mustard—that's fudging—cloves, curry, chutney, cumin, caraway, cinnamon, consommé, caramel candy, cranberry jelly, canned clam chowder, cornmeal, Cream of Wheat, ice cream—"

"That's 'cream, iced,' "

"Chocolate ice cream and cherry ice cream. And toasted onions."

"Toasted onions? That's not on the list. What's C about toasted onions?"

"Spice Island brand toasted onions." Tom held up the small glass jar.

"There's one more unchecked item at the end of the list: custard mix."

"That's all that's in the bag. No custard mix."

"So, there's one thing in the bag that isn't on the list and doesn't begin with C," Wimbie said. "If this were a children's mystery story, that would be a clue. Maybe it is. I don't think the list allows that kind of cheating. Somebody else probably put the toasted on-

ions in her basket by mistake. That happens all the time. I could understand her buying something crucial—what did she do about toilet paper when she first got here, for example? But why would she need toasted onions especially? Someone must have put it in her cart.”

“She’s such a spectacle in the store that it’s hard to imagine anybody getting near her cart and not knowing it wasn’t theirs. It could have been put in by somebody trying to play a joke on her.”

“The last alphabetical thing she bought was curry. Custard is last on the list, but there isn’t any custard. Curry’s on the spice shelf. So are toasted onions. Do you suppose that something frightened her when she was at the spice shelf, so she picked up the toasted onions as a clue?”

“How do you know so much about what shelves things are on?” Tom asked.

“You forget I’m an amateur chef. You’re sure there are no fancy young men?”

“I’m not sure of anything.”

They looked around the house, which was clean and tidy and full of sunlight reflected from the sea, but cluttered with objects purchased in foreign places and with framed photographs of Minnie at various ages with various handsome young men in various romantic backgrounds. Tom and Wimbie went through every room. Nothing seemed to explain her disappearance.

“I think I’m going to end up looking damned foolish,” Tom said, “but let’s treat her as a missing person. After all, she *is* missing, and I’d feel right bad if anything had happened to her. Nellie White lives just down the road. Let’s see if she knows anything. She’s in here to clean several days a week. Then we can go to the store and shop for a little information.”

Tom left a note asking Minnie to call the police office when she got home, and they set out again.

Nellie White lived in a stationary mobile home on a dirt road a mile away. She knew nothing about any young men or visitors. It did seem to her that Minnie Willaby was buying more at the grocery store than ever, but Nellie didn’t think it had anything to do with mouths to feed. Miss Willaby had been giving Nellie food to take home when it was about to go bad.

Outside the grocery store, Tom and Wimbie saw Evan and Ellen Kingsley.



"The Kingsleys and the Willabys have known each other for generations," Tom said. "The Kingsleys' great-grandfather started coming here about the same time Minnie's grandfather did. Maybe they can tell us something."

Tom explained to the handsome, quiet-looking couple that they'd found Minnie's car and groceries, but no Minnie.

Evan Kingsley smiled and shook his gray head. "You never know with Minnie, but I can't imagine that anything serious has happened to her."

Ellen Kingsley spoke up. "The few times we've seen her this summer, she's talked about the art school. She was very enthusiastic about it."

"A handsome young man at the art school, do you think?"

"It's possible."

"We might go over there and look around. Thank you." He turned to Wimbie. "While we're here, let's go into the store."

"Miss Willaby?" said Kitty Purley, the young blonde girl at the checkout counter. "Oh, she was in this morning. She's in every morning." She grinned. It was clear that she felt very young, attractive, and sensible compared to Miss Willaby.

"But was there anything odd about her this morning?" As Tom spoke, he realized that he had not phrased the question quite properly.

They both laughed, and the girl said, "No more than usual. I mean, nothing different. Except maybe she was a little more nervous than usual. She seemed kind of in a hurry."

"I know you have a lot of people in here, but do you remember who else might have been in about the same time?"

"There was a summer woman. I don't know her name. I think she has a cottage over to Brook Cove. She and Miss Willaby said good morning to each other, so I remember that. Pat from the Cabbage Patch, came in for cigarettes. He always chats a little, if it's not too busy. I remember when I was talking to him, Miss Willaby went back and forth a few times. And then there was that good looking man from the art school. His name's Tony. I think he makes sculpture."

"And he was here the same time Miss Willaby was?"

"I'm pretty sure he checked out just a little after she did. When she's going through the line, I mean, she's so—well, you know—odd, I kind of want to look away. She kind of upsets me when I'm face to face with her. You know what I mean? But that Tony, he made

me feel good again. He's—well, he's sexy, you know, he's got lots of muscles and the way he looks at you— it's not like he's making a pass or anything."

"Do you remember what he bought?"

"Oh yes, the usual things. Cokes, snack bars, some fruit. That's mostly what he lives on. He said once he didn't like to stop working long enough for a real meal."

Someone came up behind them with a basket, and Tom and Wimbie left the store.

"Tony Toasted Onions," said Wimbie, as they got into the car.

"It's not a T day."

They went along the road where they'd found the Elephant. Tom's sign still fluttered in the breeze. They looped by still-deserted Cormorant Point, then headed toward the art school.

The school was a rambling series of modern, shingled buildings in the woods on a bluff overlooking the sea, quite isolated from any settlement. The director, Norton Warren, a neat man who exuded a hum of energy, looked distressed but not surprised when he saw Tom Lawson. It was not unknown for the young people in the school to get in occasional trouble after a few beers, a little pot, or just plain high spirits.

"Do you have a sculptor here whose first name is Tony?"

"What has he done?" Now Warren did look surprised.

"As far as I know, he hasn't done anything, but he might be able to help us with a little puzzle we're working on." Tom's tone of voice shifted slightly. "I understand Miss Minnie Willaby's very interested in the school."

"Yes, she has shown interest," Warren said evenly.

Warren's face didn't change much. She's not a big donor, Wimbie thought, or he'd be looking more enthusiastic.

"She hasn't been over here this morning, by any chance?"

"I haven't seen her for several days. I doubt if she's been here."

"Did you ever notice anything special between her and this Tony?"

Warren flushed a little. "She did seem especially interested in his work."

"What's his last name, by the way?"

"Cebolla."

Wimbie looked at Tom sharply.

"How do you spell that?" Tom asked.

"C-e-b-o-l-l-a. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. It just fits a little pattern we were playing with. Could we talk to this Tony Cebolla?"

"He's not here. I just walked through the sculpture studio. As a matter of fact, I saw him go off on his motorcycle a while ago. He's usually here, working day and night. He's making a big metal piece that he's trying to finish before he leaves. He doesn't play around at all, and I'd be very surprised if he'd got into any trouble."

"He lives here on the grounds?"

"Oh, yes, we have housing for all the students here."

"We'll be back this afternoon if we don't find what we're looking for."

"May I ask what you're looking for?"

"Miss Minnie Willaby."

As Tom started the car, he said, "At least, we found something—or someone—that begins with a C."

"We even found a grocery that begins with a C."

"We did?"

"Cebolla is 'onion' in Spanish."

Tom was thoughtful for a moment. "She would know that, too. Back when she had more money, she used to go to Mexico in the winter. I think she spent a fair amount of time in Spain, too. So, what have we got? A young man who's the type Millie is known to like, in whose work she takes an interest, who was in the store at the same time she was, whose name is 'Onion' in Spanish. And we have a jar of toasted onions that doesn't make any sense on her shopping list. Why toasted onions? Why not onion salt? Is there any reason? What do you do with toasted onions, anyway?"

"I'll give you a recipe sometime, Tom. But where is Tony Cebolla now?"

"I guess I should be more worried about all this than I am. I keep feeling that maybe she just wanted to buy toasted onions on a C day and this was a way of getting around the problem. But where is she? And, you're right, where is he? Let's go by Cormorant Point and see if she's come back. Then let's get some lunch—nothing that begins with C—and after that we can go back to the art school."

Minnie Willaby was not at Cormorant Point, so they ate lobster rolls and tea and orange sherbet, drove past Cormorant Point once more, then went back to the art school.

Norton Warren pointed out a young man working on a huge, twisting piece of metal. He wore a protective mask and was using an acetylene torch.

"Toasted," Wimbie said to Tom.

"As well as I can see him, he's just the sort she used to pick up now and then."

They stood waiting till the torch stopped and the sculptor raised his hood. He was looking at the metal and did not seem to notice them at first. Then he looked over and stared at them as if from far away.

"Could we speak to you a minute?" Tom asked.

"Go away! I came here to work, not to be interrupted all the time!"

"Then I'll come right to the point. What did you do with Miss Willaby?"

"I put her in solitary confinement."

"Look, son, I don't want to take you in, but I can arrest you."

"'Arrest' means stop, and you're already stopping me from working. I'm the one who should be making a complaint." He was looking at the sculpture all the time he talked. "I've only got three more days here, and I want to finish this thing. I came here for peace and concentration, not to be bothered by a batty old woman." He pulled down his mask and started the torch again. He looked furious and cruel. Tom and Wimbie looked away from the violent light and searing metal.

They waited until he stopped again.

"What did you do with her?"

"I put her where she won't bother me."

He started the torch again.

Finally, with angry gestures, he put down the torch and ripped off the mask. "Don't you understand? I want to finish this! That stupid old woman was around here all the time pestering me. She's nuts. Can you believe that last week she invited me to a dinner of prawns, pig's feet, pastrami, peas, parsley potatoes, pickles, pecan pie, peppermint ice cream, and peanut brittle? I should have got an injunction against her: I don't have time for that kind of junk!"

"Where is she now?"

"She's locked up where she can't bother me."

"I have to ask where that is."

"She came here this morning. Said she was going to the store and would come back to take me to lunch. She said it was a special day. I told her where she could really go, but she said she was coming anyway. After she left, I was so mad I couldn't concentrate,

so I went over to the store to lay in some supplies so I wouldn't have to stop working for the next three days. She was fluttering around in there like a bat. I didn't want to make a scene in the store, so I just made some threatening gestures to her. She left and went careening all over the road in that old car. I followed her on my cycle. I could make a sculpture out of that car. That's about the only thing it's good for. I passed her and stopped in front, and she got out of the car and jumped on the back of the cycle as if I'd picked her up for an elopement. Her driveway is just a little way down the road. Nobody happened to be going by. She'd told me about what she called the honeymoon cottage, that house way back in the woods where nobody ever goes. I put her in there and locked all the doors from the outside. The first-floor windows are mostly stuck. I nailed three of them. She'll keep there until I finish what I came to do."

Once more, Tom and Wimbie got in the car. "If she leapt on the back of his cycle, I guess I can't hold him on a kidnapping charge," Tom said, "at least, not until we've heard her story. It looks as if she picked the wrong type this time. He's got a lot more character than most of her young men. I don't suppose anybody's stayed in that house for years. She might be kind of uncomfortable in there for three days."

The house was almost overgrown, but there was a light on in the kitchen. Tom took a passkey and opened the kitchen door. Minnie Willaby, in a floppy jacket and flapping slacks, was arranging cans of soup alphabetically. It was clear that she had brought over a lot of excess food from the cottage. Some cream of celery soup was heating on the stove. Minnie's face was radiant.

"Tom Lawson, it's nice of you to come by! I have to tell you about my adventure. I haven't had so much fun for a long time. I was threatened and carried off and imprisoned by a handsome young man. Isn't that wonderful? And now I'm rescued by the chief of police. That's exciting! That's more adventure than I've had in years. The one thing I was worrying about was whether I was going to miss a day at the store, because then I wouldn't know whether to go on to D or to skip D and pick up on whatever day I was supposed to be on. But now, I'm rescued and I've made out my D list for tomorrow. Damson jam, Danish, dates, dental floss, detergent, devil's food cake, dill, doughnuts. . . ."



# The Mirror Image

## by Jeffry Scott

**T**he great thing about Egg Henry, he was reliable, consistent. You could count on him to foul up. Egg Henry had touched every snafu base around life's diamond, from tailing the wrong suspect for three days, to securing vital photo evidence in a false claim for whiplash before discovering that the camera needed film.

Even so, retired patrolman

Egbert Henry was kind of relaxing to have on your side. My trade isn't rife with integrity, loyalty. Hire people and I can count on them having an angle. Those too dumb to be devious worry the hell out of me, making me wonder what else is wrong with them. With Egg Henry, one knew.

On the credit side, his luck was good and he persevered,

*Illustration by Nick Jainschiggs*

rarely getting an assignment totally wrong—until that final incident. Egg knew his business after a fashion: the fashion of Salvador Dali.

Using Egg was an annual, trivial hazard like hay fever. I had to bring him in once a year, he was an honorary uncle—my father and he were fellow rookies in the fifties—and he'd have been hurt otherwise. I got away with that annual go-round because Egg knew I was small-time in a big city with too many PIs.

I'd trot out Egg Henry anecdotes, like Dad's "Big Red One" and "Normandy" tales. Egg irritated the hell out of me and maybe I loved the old duffer a little bit.

**M**rs. Nina Farwell, on the other hand, didn't love her husband at all.

Eric Farwell had money same as I have hairs on my head, and baldness has never been a family problem. It should have been jake for the pair of them. One gathered that Eric got a kick out of his wife's staying awake nights figuring how to spend his wealth, and she loved putting those plans into action. Had to be so, since the marriage had lasted twenty happy years.

Sadly, Eric Farwell bought the lady a snazzy Italian sports

car with dove grey seats and like that.

It was sad because he bought an identical model for his mistress. Murphy's Law doesn't skip adulterers (how it doesn't!), so the dealership sent the paperwork on both purchases, in the same envelope, while Eric Farwell was on a business trip to Canada. Still sadly, he operated from home, and the letter went there.

Like many a wife, Mrs. Farwell opened all letters, regardless of addressee. Or maybe she'd been getting suspicious. Either way, it took her all of a split second to spot the duplication—two cars, count 'em, folks—and reach the obvious conclusion.

"I want to know who she is, everything about her," Mrs. Farwell instructed me. She'd re-sealed that envelope and replaced it in the pile on the blotter in hubby's den-office and now she was loaded for bear.

Her voice dropped a notch. "I want them nailed, mister—dates, times, places, pictures." My tiny office resounded to the majestic, crashing chords of the Alimony March.

Nina Farwell had been a lovely girl and evidently stayed in touch through tennis, aerobics, diets. Still foxy, at long range. But she had the aura of



having contracted terminal unhappiness way back, and it had been in remission, not licked, ever since.

Time for sincere lies about the cost of what she was talking. Three shifts around the clock, two extra ops on the payroll. The patter made me feel grubby because I intended covering two shifts myself, with a cheap drudge for the rest. Cheaper than me, that is, which came out Egg Henry.

She cut me off by slapping a check on the desk. "This will start you." It could have finished a fellow with a cardiac condition, but multiple zeroes make my mouth water.

As soon as Mrs. Farwell left, I hit the phone for Egg.

**M**r. Eric Farwell's money, via his wife, bought me a name and address on the second car. The name was Billie McVee—which had a ring of Las Vegas, somehow—and the address made me chuckle.

From the snapshot Mrs. Farwell had supplied, Eric looked a stuffy character, juiceless unless you counted the lemon he seemed to have sucked a moment before posing. But the man had a sense of humor. French farce, where they keep dashing in and out of convenient doors.

For he had installed Ms. McVee right across Second Avenue from his place in the Sedalia.

Mrs. Farwell could have saved a small fortune just by putting binoculars to those embittered, tragic eyes and carefully scanning the narrow cliff of glass and steel that was Expo Towers, the building opposite. The Other Woman's studio apartment was there.

The Sedalia fills a whole block, and it's squeezed. It makes the Dakota look sleekly modern. Imagine a crash between a chateau and a castle and an old railroad terminal, and you'll picture the place. Cheater's heaven, the iron-strapped, nail-studded street doors offering a dozen different exits and entrances around the block.

That was a bitch of a winter, dying grim and hard. Feet going dead in the slush, I spent hours waiting for Eric Farwell. I stayed out of the building; there's nothing antiquated about the Sedalia's security. It's a plush penitentiary where you go for crimes like Old Money or New Wealth, only the aim is to keep most folks out rather than in.

Once Eric Farwell's regular routes became plain, the job was a cinch. He kept shuttling between the Sedalia and Expo Towers like a human pinball.

Mornings, early, he'd hit the street in warm-up gear and sneakers, jogging a mini-marathon down the block, across the avenue, and in at the back of Expo Towers. Staying an hour or so. Afternoons, he spent longer before going home—his other home with Mrs. Nina Farwell. At nights, ol' Eric repeated his "jogging."

Next stage was to concentrate on Billie McVee. Expo Towers, glaringly new yet doomed to deteriorate almost as soon as it opened, was more my kind of place. The day doorman-porter was a horse player and his partner was accustomed to something more than fresh air in his nostrils, on a heavy and regular basis. Ray and Fred, the Tacky Twins.

Even in their smart uniforms, already wilting, they yelled Arkansas or Alabama, somewhere in Dr. Pepper, shotgun-in-the-pickup country. Despite their city-blurred dialects, twitchy Fred and sullen Ray spoke fluent Bribery. After some initial edginess, they gladly fingered Billie McVee for me.

The sight of the girl jarred my mental picture, which had been Vegas hooker or pouting L.A. baby-opportunist. Billie McVee was downright homely, maybe twenty years old but looking younger. Not sexily so, just braces-and-gaucheness

younger. But she did lack a regular job—I tailed her to plenty of museums, exhibitions, and other cultural timekillers—and apparent sources of income.

Ray, for ten dollars more, disclosed that her rent was paid through a legal outfit off Wall Street. Minimal brains and a bullying streak made Ray my main man at Expo Towers. Fred sniffed a lot, said little, and looked wistful, unless it was just stupidity.

But Fred, recreational inhalant expert, did admit to having braced Ms. McVee for his Christmas tip the previous month. She'd only just moved in, but those guys had no shame. Billie McVee, highly embarrassed, explained that she was waiting for her allowance from...

Grizzled Ray, with his pygmy brow and too much jaw, grinned wisely. "From just who, she couldn't rightly say. Blushed down to her toes, little hoor, trying to think up a fancy name for her daddy."

As for Eric Farwell, he had a key, so Sniffin' Fred and Rancid Ray assumed he was a tenant. They'd have lasted one minute, tops, across at the Sedalia. I wasn't displeased by their failure to link him with Billie McVee and did not enlighten them. Nina Farwell had ordered me to be discreet.

After that I stayed clear of Expo Towers. The Tacky Twins were skittish, wanting my money but disturbed by my presence. From Ray's brooding glint, he had me pegged as a burglar on the scout, using interest in the McVee girl to blow smoke at him.

Three days later—times were hard and you'd have hastened slowly yourself on Mrs. Farwell's bounty—the picture was focusing.

But Mrs. Farwell's type of client usually wants more. I was frazzled, so I called Egg Henry in at last.

He lived way over in Jersey, but my demand for him to show ten minutes ago fetched him in a speedy two hours.

Every time we met I marvelled at Egg's appearance of being such a regular, highly organized old guy. Much of his tailoring, on a pension, was Thrift Shop. But he had ample leisure to hunt for good stuff, and the pinstriped suit, dark topcoat, and only faintly ratty homberg made Egbert Henry look imposing.

His pink face shone, the milky blue eyes sparkled, he spoke crisply. Two or three times he gave me Dad's first name without noticing.

Laying out the bare bones of the case, I passed over to him Nina Farwell's Polaroid of hus-

band Eric and my own, covertly-taken 35-millimeter snaps of Billie McVee, full face and profile.

I told him to watch the Sedalia and Expo Towers, which was likely to confirm Farwell's homing-pigeon flight patterns to and fro.

"Fish in a barrel, son," he assured me. Egg always said that. He winked, adding, "Surveillance running like a Swiss watch; I'm a class act, huh?" I'd heard that before as well, and seen it come out as cuckoo clock.

Smiling wanly, I gave him the midnight to eight A.M. stint and the rental car's keys. He'd collect little more than cramps that night, but even negative information bulks out a report.

Egg was delighted at getting wheels. Years ago I helped a city-only rental outfit, one so small they don't Try Harder at anything save survival. They still allowed me a fifty percent discount, a clue to their lack of success. Egg planned to take straight off for Long Island and his married daughter's house until it was time for him to start work. That was fine: being Egg Henry, he'd faithfully pay his own gas and tolls.

No sooner had Egg left than Nina Farwell phoned, demanding a progress report. Since Eric Farwell was at the apartment, we met in Bells, an op-

ulently nasty bar near the Sedalia. Bells always jinxes me and sure enough, the deal went critical there.

The bar's lighting was emphatically subdued, but it must have bothered Nina Farwell because her shades went on almost as soon as I started talking.

"McVee," she repeated in a whisper. About the way Dracula would respond to an offer of garlic with holy water on the side. Except that her tone was complex and might have been awe rather than repulsion. A raft of interesting expressions struggled to reach her face.

She cleared her throat and you could sense self-control slamming home, like a submarine's hatches being dogged in readiness for a dive.

"I've changed my mind," she announced flatly. "Drop this matter, it's over, we're through. Forget it—and leave . . . uh, everyone involved strictly alone in the future."

Mrs. Farwell had shifted gears fast enough for the Indy 500 or Le Mans, but it was her privilege and I got to keep a week's advance for seventy-two hours on duty. She hurried out of Bells as if I had something scandalous and catching.

As ever, Egg Henry was the sole snag. I didn't know his Long Island location, and he

wasn't due in the Sedalia-Expo Towers area until midnight. Meaning that I had to hack all the way back uptown in the middle of the night to call him off.

By nine that evening the wind chill factor and the cosiness of my apartment gave me a better idea. Egg might as well do his stint, saving me a journey. I'd pay him off, not mentioning that the assignment had been terminated, when he checked in the following morning.

Guns kill, knives kill; but then so can good old human laziness.

**E**gg had not surfaced by ten the next morning, but the car rental firm called, in reaming mode. Ransoming-towed cars from the pound they could do without, even if the penalty went on my account.

"You get half rates," snarled the manager before hanging up on me, "and we get full hassle, some sweet deal!" Egg Henry was breaking new ground—fouling up on a case when there wasn't any case.

Next on the horn was Phil Shippman, and my stomach roiled. Shippman's a buddy and former comrade in arms, if you will. But he works Homicide and doesn't make daytime so-

cial calls. "You by any chance still helping Egg Henry pretend he's useful?" Lieutenant Shippman demanded.

I hesitated before compromising on the lie indirect. "Egg? I thought he'd long since retired."

Not that I'd leave him in the lurch, but it made sense to find out what trouble he had unleashed.

Shippman, too overworked to notice evasiveness in a friend, simply grunted.

"What's this about, Phil?" I was desperate to know and he'd get around to wondering if I *didn't* ask.

"Somebody practiced illegal cranial surgery on old Henry, last night or the early hours today. With a club—pool cue, baseball bat, like that. Happened on a midtown cross street by the Sedalia."

*"He's dead?"*

"Better be," Lieutenant Shippman sighed, "on account of the autopsy should be going down at this time. Have a good day, kid."

**I**t felt the same as always, the wrong weight. Heavy for its size, too light for a lethal instrument. I have a carry permit for the .38 and use the piece regularly—like every time there's a blue moon. Handguns invite trouble and very

often beg for it; right then that suited me fine.

At Expo Towers, Ray sold the news that Billie McVee, "looking upset some," had left before five the previous afternoon, when he and Fred finished work.

Buzzing her apartment brought no response. For a further dollar Fred checked the basement garage, reporting that her car, catalyst for this mess, was still there, hood cold and gathering dust.

Ray sidled close, made bold by my shellshocked mood. "What's up? Betcha it's not about the girl. C'mon, you can tell me," he wheedled. Sure I could, he was such an upright guy.

Not bothering to answer, I jaywalked over Second to the Sedalia. Its house phone matched the museum decor, but it worked.

Cutting off Mrs. Farwell's indignation, I snapped, "Tell the old family retainers down here in the lobby to send me on up. Because I'm coming anyway, and you and the old man had better be there."

The city's full of animals, many capable of street mayhem for no sound reason. That was nudging Phil Shippman into filing Egg Henry under PENDING, en route to FORGET. I didn't blame him. An outsider could take it for random murder, but to me it stank.

First, Nina Farwell deep-sixes ironclad signs of husbandly misdeeds likely to make her independently rich if followed up. More than that, she panics and tells me to get lost. Hours later, Egg Henry blunders into the fringes of the same business and gets dead in a hurry.

There had to be a connection.

The Farwell apartment was startling. The Sedalia might be somber but up here was a home almost dazzlingly bright and airy, flooded by brilliance from the sky and the snowclad roofs around it.

That wasn't the surprise, however. The shock came from finding Billie McVee sitting very close to Nina Farwell on a putty-colored, squashy leather couch long enough to accommodate the Dallas Cowboys. The girl seemed dazed, and Mrs. Farwell had the smudged, slightly smug aura of a lady who is all cried out and ready for the upswing.

Having shown me in, Eric Farwell hovered. Billie McVee's pale mouth bunched spitefully. "This must be Sam Spade, right?" A vein ticked on my temple. Egg Henry was dead because of her, and she cracked wise.

Nina Farwell put a protective arm around the girl. "You gather that Billie knows I hired you to snoop. We don't have se-

crets in this family any more. So if you're hoping for a shake-down—"

Mr. Farwell sneaked me the glance of a man who loves his wife while being appalled by her flaws. Billie McVee jeered, "Of course it's blackmail. Look at the man, sneakiness on the hoof."

I spoke to Mrs. Farwell. "There was a foul-up last night, my fault. One of my men maintained surveillance on your husband and Susie Sweetness there. My man was murdered, you people are tied in somehow. Forget blackmail, this one you can't buy out of. I want answers and they go to the PD along with the killer."

Billie's eyes popped open, but she sneered, "Listen to that . . . 'Somebody killed my partner.' Strictly from old movies."

Eric Farwell made a protesting sound. His wife jumped between me and the girl. Hands flat against my chest, she gasped, "The child's upset, don't get angry. We're all . . . under strain."

Taking a deep breath, she went on, "Listen to me, and you'll understand how wrong you are. Sit down. For a start, my full name is Nina McVee Farwell. Billie is my niece, my sister Beth's daughter." Mrs. Farwell's chin came up. "She's Eric's daughter, also."

"Ah," I commented brilliantly.

"You could say that. Eric was engaged to Beth, but I seduced him, stole him, there's no nice way of putting it. Eric and I ran away together and got married. Soon afterwards Beth found out she was pregnant by Eric.

"Beth and I were orphans, no family to keep us in touch. After what I did to her—"

"It took two," Farwell groaned.

She nodded wearily. "Anyway, we weren't surprised when Beth never answered our letters asking her to forgive, and moved without leaving a forwarding address."

Nina Farwell touched Billie McVee's shoulder. "Your mother wanted Eric and me to have a fair chance. She wasn't ashamed of you; never think that, darling."

Farwell told me: "I found out about Billie last year, after her mother died; it was a chance discovery. I went after her; brought her back to New York, but I wasn't sure whether Nina could handle it . . ."

Taking up the story, his wife added, "And I saw the whole thing in a flash, when you spoke Billie's name. We always wanted children and now we have her; it's a miracle. The three of us were in here until four this morning, talking, ex-

plaining. . . . Billie stayed over, this is her home now. None of us left the apartment last night—and do you really think any of us capable of murder? When we're so happy?"

I'd already asked myself that. The Farwells and Billie were elated, fearful, embarrassed, and above all, self-absorbed. Murder was the last thing on their minds, and now that all three of them knew the score, there was no motive.

Billie McVee spoke gruffly. "Ever since Mom died and I read her diaries . . . well, it's been some kind of year. Too much coming at me too fast. I say things I don't mean. Like just now—it was dumb and gross and I'm truly sorry."

"No problem." I refused a drink and got out fast. I was happy for all three of them; if they were linked to the killing it was in some unwitting, off-the-wall way. But Egg Henry was dead as ever.

**S**tart again. I was sick of the Sedalia and the lobby phones in Expo Towers were in range of big ears, so I used one on the street. Taking an age to fumble coins into the slot.

It was arctic out there. Even well heated buildings sported snowcaps and icicle pendants. Colder ones were piebald with



ice, and abandoned places were sheeted in the stuff.

Phil Shippman had left, but the guy catching at his desk updated me. That took no time, there was nothing new. I asked where Egg had been found, exactly. It was so numbingly cold that I was halfway to a bus stop before my brain cut in.

Egg Henry's body had been huddled in the shadow of a long mound of snow cleared from the street and forming an unthawed wall along the curb. He had been beaten to death within yards of the rental car, left on the cross street near the corner of Second Avenue. (The tow crew must have almost stepped over him, never noticing.)

Something was skewed. Stand where Egg had fallen, and you couldn't see the main entrance to Expo Towers, let alone the Sedalia's on the far side of Second. From that section of the street—a real Manhattan canyon—the only visible part of Expo Towers was its side elevation, blank except for the name in flowing neon script, three stories up and twenty feet wide. No entrance, not even windows on that side, therefore no point in watching it.

Okay, say Egg had been attacked as soon as he parked the car, before going on foot around the corner to Second, where he could see Expo Towers' main

door and the Sedalia frontage. . .

It still made no sense. Egg shouldn't have been on foot. An Eskimo would have jibbed at standing sentry in such cold, and Egg Henry was no spring chicken; hypothermia was a genuine hazard. That's why I had sprung for wheels, giving him a heated, windproof vantage point.

He should have parked on Second or a cross street on the far side of it. That way, he could keep an eye on the Sedalia, right beside him, and Expo Towers. In fact, I had advised him to do just that.

Instead, he'd lingered here in a useless position. I located the spot from PD sawhorses stacked against the front of an abandoned building. They had fenced a patch of sidewalk where his blood still showed as rust smears in frozen slush.

The building looked dead as old Egg. Pipes had burst up top, coating the frontage with wind-burnished ice. At street level the door of what had been a head shop was boarded over; slabs of marine plywood nailed across the display windows. Next to that was an archway whose rusty iron lattice gates were secured by a fat padlock.

I recalled that back when Cadillacs had fins and Iran was just the past tense of racing, this dump had been staff hostel

for a department store. The archway was the mouth of a service tunnel for light trucks delivering food in bulk, collecting laundry, and so forth.

Now it was doomed to demolition once the weather eased, making way for another quickie apartment block like Expo Towers, opposite.

I shuddered, though not from the fresh attack of peppery-fine grains of snow. It was from staring at the unlit neon of Expo Towers and understanding what had happened to Egg.

He wasn't used to driving any more, and it had been dark. Heading along Second, he'd seen the landmark of the Sedalia block with Expo Towers opposite, realized he was on the wrong side of the avenue and must drive around the Expo block to reach the cross street beside the Sedalia, where I'd told him to be. So he hung the turn.

That's where it got confusing for him. He could see Expo Towers on the corner—and *another* Expo Towers across the street, a scrawl of yellow neon proving the fact.

Being Egg, he stopped to check this out. Maybe Expo Towers had a sister building I'd forgotten to mention. At Egg Henry's age, I was a green kid likely to get stuff wrong.

So he parked for a minute,

confirming that he was beside the blank side elevation of Expo Towers, and went to inspect the other building.

Strangely, the door was boarded over and the lattice gates were locked, though being Egg, no doubt he had been tire-somely thorough, rattling the gates, kicking the boarded door. Then he would have put on the glasses he never wore while driving and was too vain to use at all except in short bursts.

Probably Egg Henry, on the verge of violent death, laughed sheepishly. Finding that he'd been fooled by a reflection. The derelict building's sign was blurred and reversed—an illusion cast on its ice-sheathed bricks by the real Expo Towers sign across the way.

I wasn't reaching. I'd had years to learn the way Egg ticked over, the seeds of the goofs he made. It explained why he'd stopped in the wrong place. And maybe why he'd been murdered. I wasn't reaching, I *knew*.

There was a hardware store three blocks over and a block downtown, where I bought bolt-cutters. Half an hour later, having added a sandwich and a paperback to my purchases—it might be a long wait—I forced the archway's lattice gates.

That put me in a dank, tiled tunnel. A fair amount of street debris, leaves, newspaper scraps,

discarded fast-food wrappings, had blown through the gates and formed a mulch on the floor. The layer was flattened in a path to a door a few paces along the tunnel.

It sprung on the second kick, letting me in at the side of the empty head shop. The space had been gutted of fixtures before the building had been closed, but it wasn't empty any more.

You'd think garage sale, only the items were brand new and laid out on a tarp to protect them from the moldy floor. TV's, a typewriter, VCR's, even a ten-speed bike still in its European maker's protective padding.

I had expected something like this and been sure of it when those rusty lattice gates slid back sweetly, recently oiled. Thieves and generals commanding logistics bases share the same problem: where the hell do you keep the stuff?

I ate my sandwich, couldn't settle to the book, checked the .38 for maybe the fifth time that day. The chill began eating my bones. I wished I had brought a radio. I kept rubbing my hands, flexing the fingers.

**T**owards evening, they came in together. Amateur Night: pros would have taken off the moment they discovered the hasp

of the padlock had been snipped, then replaced. But they weren't bright, and I was sitting on their treasure.

In their bulky parkas, Ray and Fred made a brace of Abominable Snowmen. Ray had a switchblade and Fred grasped one of those kitchen knives featured on late-late commercials, \$9.99 the set and they'll stay honed for a century.

"Try running and we'll cut you bad," Ray growled. Cunnning underlaid the anger. He meant to kill me anyway. "You and your sidekick was after us all along—us and what we got. Planning to rip us off."

Sure we were. They had a thousand bucks' worth of hot goods here, at fences' prices. Riches beyond compare.

I smiled nicely, putting extra spin on the question. "No baseball bat, Ray? Guess you broke it on the old guy's head."

His sort never thinks straight. If I was a dead man, it didn't matter how much I knew. But he gobbled, uncertain whether to agree.

Fred said proudly, "We been sleeping here nights, ever since you started snooping over to the Towers. So we kep' watch, turn and turn about. I peeked out and caught the old guy casin' our stash. Snuck out the back way, circled, jumped him."

That was what I was waiting

to hear. The .38 snagged on my pocket lining, putting years on me, before freeing. I shot Fred in the right shoulder. Nothing personal, he was closer and his blade looked worse.

He went down and threw some kind of convulsion, heels drumming. I grabbed Ray's wrist with my left hand and slid the revolver's barrel into his gape of shock and alarm. Tasting the .38 on his tongue, Ray gagged and dropped the knife and then his knees buckled and he thumped down on his butt.

"Tend your partner," I ordered.

Working clumsily, he said: "Fred's always been trash, but me, I know right from wrong. Think I wanted to steal and . . . and the rest? Do you? We could never get straight. Not down home, not here. My lord, we tried! I could of been a decent man, but it was steal or starve."

"Shut up," I replied suavely. Terror had passed, leaving no thrill of victory. Mostly I wanted the bathroom.

Egg Henry was still dead and I still felt responsible. Compulsive losers Fred and Ray had excelled themselves. Eric Farwell was reunited with an illegitimate kid, his barren wife had gained a niece and proxy

daughter. Bottom line significance of all that? Go figure it.

A police car whooped and yelped nearby, possibly on our account. The .38 makes an alarming noise indoors, the street was busy, somebody might have called it in.

"I could of been decent," Ray insisted. "Ever do field work from dark to dark? Not to stay ahead even, just to feed your kids?" *And your bookie*, I could have amended, but it was no time for cheap shots. As he soothed Fred, the parka's outline lent Ray the disturbing suggestion of a cowed monk kneeling at prayer.

Cops were stamping around in the service entry. Hollering to them, I pocketed the .38 to avoid lethal errors when they burst in.

Squinting up at me, Ray's weird air of triumph made my skin crawl. "If 'n you had been in my shoes, would you of done any better, huh?"

His ruined teeth bared and his eyes squeezed shut. Whether he was laughing or weeping, the triumph persisted. Then his face smoothed out and he went back to plugging Fred's shoulder.

"You won't never be sure," he said softly as the first cop came in.

# No More Teacher's Dirty Looks

by Michael Christie

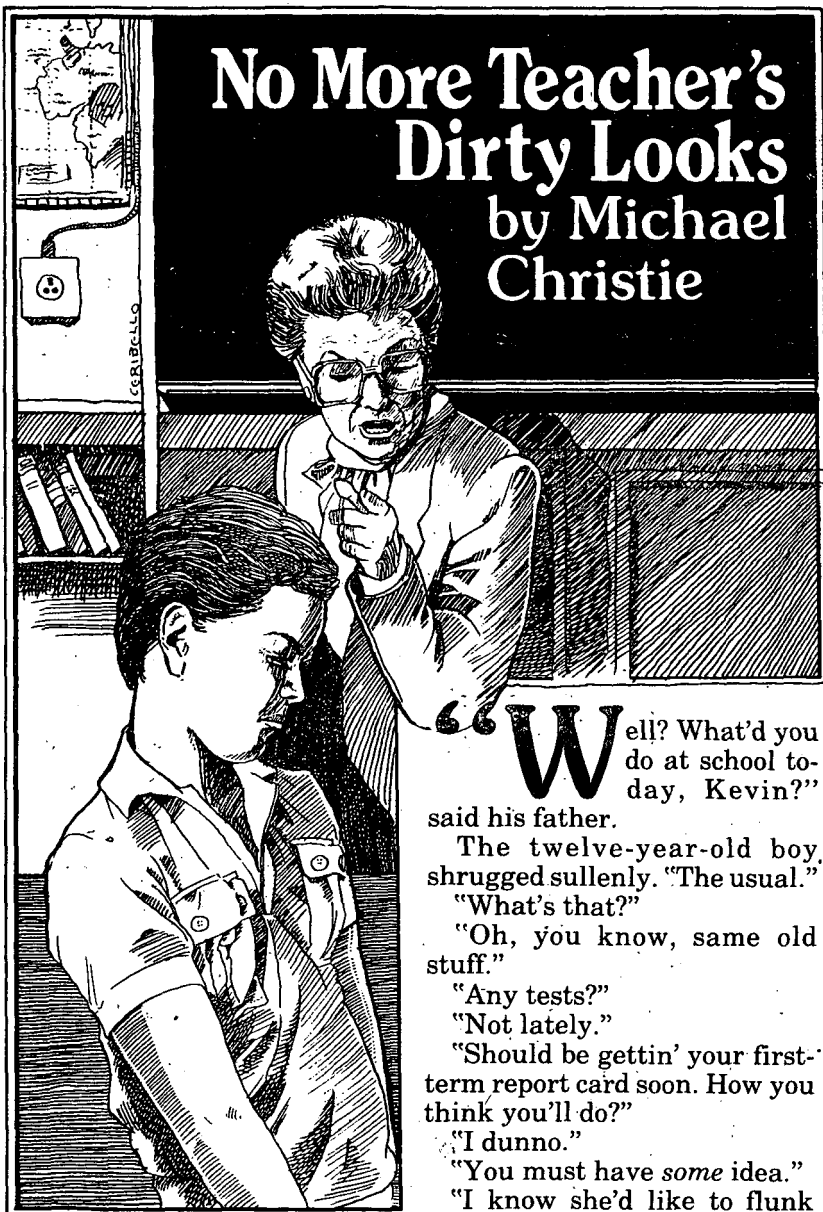


Illustration by Jim Ceribello

“Well? What’d you do at school today, Kevin?” said his father.

The twelve-year-old boy shrugged sullenly. “The usual.”

“What’s that?”

“Oh, you know, same old stuff.”

“Any tests?”

“Not lately.”

“Should be gettin’ your first-term report card soon. How you think you’ll do?”

“I dunno.”

“You must have *some* idea.”

“I know she’d like to flunk me. Old Lady Connerly hates

my guts," the boy blurted out.

"Come on! I'm sure she don't hate you."

"She does so. You should see the dirty looks she gives me all the time."

His father laughed. "That's what teachers get paid for. Just kiddin'. Anyway, I hope you're makin' a better effort now. The interim report was garbage."

"I try, but that old witch always bawls me out for somethin'."

"Probably because you got it comin'."

"I don't do nothin'."

"That's the problem. Get it? Anyway, she can't be as bad as you say."

"Go see for yourself."

"I would if I wasn't so busy. There's been a lot to do the last little while."

"She just likes to pick on me. The old bag hated me the first day of school even."

"Aw, come on, Kevin," said his father, and turned up the TV for the welterweight boxing championship. He'd been looking forward to it because it promised to be a bloodbath.

"She don't hate you. Now smarten up and get your act together. If you don't, I can guarantee your Christmas ain't gonna be a merry one. All you gotta do is work harder. And get the dumb idea outa your noggin that Connerly hates you."

But Kevin was right. Ms. Edith Connerly *did* hate him. Actually, she didn't like children much, period. She looked upon them as clients to be tolerated and serviced, and appreciated them, if at all, only at a distance. Through a fence playing ball, for instance, or performing on TV programs. Humorlessly, she saw herself as either a swimming coach who hated the water or a jockey allergic to manure. She didn't ruffle hair or pat backs like other teachers, but she usually obtained good results.

Usually. With Kevin Marsh she got nowhere. The boy was an unteachable boor who went out of his way to give her problems. He was frequently late, his work was messy and untidy, he turned around to talk and distract, abused washroom privileges, lost notebooks, misplaced textbooks, rarely did assignments, but regularly wanted to sharpen his pencil. It went on and on.

Kevin was all the Seans, Grammys, Jeffs, Tommys, Mikes, and Chucks over her thirty years with the Vancouver school district rolled into one. Yes, always boys.

Ms. Connerly thought about that as she arrived at Clearbank Elementary at her usual time of eight fifteen and backed into her usual parking place in

the lot. Her head had already begun to ache. She was thankful that she didn't meet anyone in the hall on the way to her classroom—she was in no mood for exchanging banalities about the weekend.

Kevin Marsh had better watch himself today. She almost spoke the words as she entered the empty classroom. She felt weary at the thought of having to climb a ladder and take the black construction-paper silhouettes of witches riding broomsticks off the windows. Halloween had been over for a week. The school cycle could be so tedious: the fillip of Thanksgiving; Halloween; the self-indulgent Christmas skits in the gym with the clumsy nativity scenes and grandstanding disciples; Valentine's Day and the trading of insult rhymes; Easter and the dipping and painting of eggs; Sports Day. All as durable as spiderwebs preserved in amber.

Inside this tiresome microcosm was the civilization of *Cherry Ames*, *Student Nurse*, *Superfudge*, *Black Beauty*, *Banner in the Sky*, chalk, rulers, erasers, compasses, graph paper, "exploding" ballpoint pens, dull pencils, duller crayons, messy watercolor paints, ratios, decimals, tin can telephones, saw and seen, lie and lay, change the "y" to "i" and add "es," slant your handwrit-

ing to the right, eat a good breakfast every day, the police officer is your friend, yellow felt-pen suns in the top corner of drawing paper with orange rays like porcupine quills, the coughers, the hiccoppers, the nose-blowers, the pencil sharpeners.

It was only ten minutes into the math class and Kevin wanted to sharpen his pencil.

"If I have told you once, I have told you a hundred times, Kevin. You are to sharpen your pencil before nine o'clock," she said irritably.

"I forgot."

"What do you mean you forgot?"

"I dunno," he said in a sing-song voice. "I guess I mean I forgot."

He looked pleased with himself when he drew hoots of laughter from the rest of the class.

"You have a detention after school for being a smart aleck and you will then do some lines," Ms. Connerly shouted. "And I do not want to notice you any more until the recess bell. Is that understood?"

"Yeah—I mean, yes."

A couple of the girls giggled.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, Miss Connerly."

The giggling continued. "Debbie and Stacy, be quiet or you'll be joining him. It's Ms. Connerly."



"Yes, Ms. Connerly."

Later in the afternoon she had a private talk with him in the hall where the other pupils couldn't overhear.

She was exasperated: "Kevin, this is the fourth time today you have wanted to go to the wash-room."

He looked down at his feet. "Yeah, I know."

"Stop saying 'yeah.' Is it because you are always at the drinking fountain? Is that it?"

"No, it's—"

"And take your hand away from your mouth when you are speaking to someone."

"No, Ms. Connerly."

"Is it because you just want to get out of the classroom? You know that you will not do well in school by avoiding your responsibilities. Is that what you are doing?"

"No."

"Take your hand away from your mouth. Well, what then? Do you see anyone else in the class wanting to go to the wash-room as many times as you do? Why do you think *you* should?"

"Well, it's—I—"

"I told you to take your hand away from your mouth. Well? Speak up!"

"I've got a bladder infection."

She made him move his desk to the back of the room. The boy could just as easily have head lice, too. He always looked dirty, and she wondered how often he

bathed. It was obvious the father was remiss in his single-parent duties. The man didn't attend "Meet the Teachers" night, which was a clear sign of his uninterest. Parents of good pupils always came to those events. The reason why they were good pupils. Kevin's father was likely on the dole, thought Ms. Connerly; she remembered he'd left blank the section for "occupation" on the registration form. She could imagine this indifferent person drinking away his social welfare check and not giving a hoot about anything except where his next bottle came from. He certainly didn't care about the interim report she'd mailed, for there had been no response.

Perhaps it was written too gently, too diplomatically. Then again, he was probably just one more on the growing list of apathetic parents. Beyond lip service, did anyone out there care any more? Apparently not. The public seemed to believe the myth that teachers were underworked and overpaid. They really didn't want to hear about her overcrowded classroom of forty children; her attendance counts and tiresome register, which had to be balanced vertically and horizontally; her supervisory duties at recess and lunch; the endless record keeping, budget cutbacks, mandated curricula, preview and

daybook checks, meetings, in-service workshops; the artificial grading requirements; the misbehaving children.

Misbehaving children—louts—like Kevin Marsh. Perhaps she shouldn't have become a teacher, but she wasn't trained for anything else and at the age of fifty-five she was too old to look for another job. Well, after five more years of this debilitating grind, if she weren't in Riverview Hospital with a nervous breakdown, she could retire on a livable pension. She looked forward to the time when she wouldn't have to leave her small, comfortable Point Grey house overlooking Spanish Banks. It was so pleasant during the summer just to putter around the garden, but it usually took her at least a month to unwind.

That was because of idiots like Kevin Marsh.

The following day she had another session with him out in the hall.

"Did you call me an old bag?" she said, and had the urge to put her hands around his neck, even though it was dirty, and squeeze.

He looked down at his feet and made no reply.

"I asked you a question. I heard you mumbling under your breath. I am not deaf. I will ask again. Did you call me an old bag?"

"No."

"You liar. No, what?"

"No, Ms. Connerly."

She glared at him. Ms. Saslaff, his teacher last year, had said she hated him by January and wanted to kill him by June. Ms. Connerly could appreciate her sentiments.

"You seem intent on making life miserable for me," she said quietly, almost in a whisper. "Well, I am going to make life miserable for *you*, you filthy, stinking little creep."

A look of shock came over his face. "C-c-creep?"

"Yes," she said with a bitter smile. "I said creep. You read me loud and clear. Creep. That is exactly the way I feel about you. I think you're a filthy, stinking little creep. No one can hear us out here, and if you tell anyone what I said about you just now, I shall deny it. From this time on, you are going to have your desk in the cloak-room, and if I hear one peep out of you, you will be standing in this hall with your snotty nose against the wall. All day if necessary."

"But it's not always me," he protested in a high voice.

"Yes, it is always you."

"No, it's not."

"Yes it is, and don't contradict me."

"No, it's *not*."

"Don't you raise your voice to me."

"But—but—"

"I don't wish to hear any butts. When you return to the classroom, you are to move your desk to the cloakroom, and more than anything else you are to keep your stupid mouth shut." She noted with satisfaction that the boy had angry tears in his eyes. "And let me warn you that if I hear any more cheekiness or rudeness, you will regret it. Now get back in there and do some work for a change."

For the next two days he was quiet, apparently still smarting from the tongue-lashing she'd given him. It had shocked her also. Never in her thirty-year career had she said anything remotely like that to a pupil. Then on Friday there was trouble. Lunches were kept in the cubbyholes of the cloakroom, and items such as chocolate bars and boxes of raisins were suddenly being missed. Everyone knew who the thief was, but it couldn't be proved.

She had no other alternative but to have him move his desk back into the classroom. Sometime in the afternoon she glanced up from her marking and saw him smiling in triumph at her, and suddenly she felt old and tired.

Trouble-makers, she thought wearily, were so annoyingly healthy and were never absent. It would be wonderful if he got the flu for a while. Even better,

it would be cause for celebration if he were suddenly transferred to another school. No matter the size of the class—and hers was one of the largest in the school—it only took one student to make life a hell.

Mrs. Sommerville, the counsellor, was no help. She listened seriously to Ms. Connerly's problem, her emphatic jawbone stuck out, her thin, bloodless face in deep concentration. She agreed unhesitatingly that Ms. Connerly had a "challenge," but she was too busy at the moment with her psychological tests to see Kevin personally. She could make some recommendations, however. She'd been to a "praise" workshop recently and suggested that Ms. Connerly's dilemma could be solved if she went out of her way to greet him with a special "good morning" or occasionally presented him with a "love token" such as a bookmark.

The latter approach was, of course, inapplicable because Kevin rarely borrowed books from the library, and when he did he left them at home, which resulted in a "no-borrowing" suspension from Mr. Laurence, the librarian. It was laughable to suggest that all things would be bright and beautiful after a "good morning" and ludicrous in the first place to ask for help from an insufferably righteous woman like Mrs. Sommerville.

Good mornings! Love tokens! Nonsense!

Ms. Connerly was not basically a violent person, but nevertheless, she hoped something excruciatingly embarrassing would happen to that smug theorist, like tripping ungracefully in front of a packed assembly in the gym and falling in such a way that everyone could see up her dress.

Mr. Lardon, the principal, was only a few months away from his sixty-fifth birthday, and he'd been retired on the job for some time now. His credo was: Don't bother me and I won't bother you. She felt the need to talk to him about Kevin, however, and after all, Mr. Lardon had the authority to expel.

She caught him after school, hustling out of the office. He was always on the run, as if there were urgent business to conduct just over the next horizon. Predictably, it turned out to be a waste of time.

"Just keep him in a few times, Edith. Give him lines, or have him pick up litter after school. That'll give him something to think about," Mr. Lardon tossed off over his shoulder, with calculated unconcern, as he disappeared into the staff room to arrange a weekend golf match, weather permitting, with Mr. Young, the resident jock.

Ms. Connerly was not a violent person, but she hoped the

old sausage—the pupils called him Lardbucket—got hit in the head with a golf ball. Hard.

She knew that asking Mrs. Phillips, the learning assistance teacher, for any help would be equally futile. Mrs. Phillips also had a credo: I deal with learning difficulties, not behavior problems.

There was no point in phoning Kevin's father. By not responding to the interim report, he'd already demonstrated his lack of interest.

Then the solution came by accident. At a teachers' general meeting, she was seated high in the bleachers of the secondary school's large gym. While she waited impatiently for the meeting to begin, she couldn't help overhearing the conversation of the two men directly in front of her.

"I'd hate to be a kid today," said one. "There's so much pressure on them to take drugs. It's going on right in the halls every day, but the pushers are too clever to get caught."

"It's no different at my school," said the other. "I've had to send home several kids who've been stoned."

"Kids are a lot different from the way they used to be, too. I overheard two of them having a discussion at a locker recently that would make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. They didn't know I was taking

in every word. These two sweetie-pies were ticked off with a kid who'd welshed on them. They'd dealt him some coke, and he'd promised to pay later. Then he complained about the quality of the stuff and refused to give them the money."

"That doesn't sound very bright."

"You'd better believe it. They weren't going to beat the welsher up. They were going to have him 'iced.' Their expression, not mine. From what I overheard, there's a man who hangs out in the bar of the Dovey Hotel who does the icing. I gather he does it as part of his long-term contract with the west coast drug ring. His name is Ray. This Ray has a moon-shaped face, and he's at the bar every day from four to six, where he makes his deals."

"Life isn't sacred any more."

"You'd better believe it. It's scary. Really scary."

"Yes, scary but necessary, thought Ms. Connerly. There were certain people who didn't deserve to live. Such a one was Kevin Marsh. It was either him or her because if this daily grinding away at her nerves continued, it was only a matter of time before she was a patient at Riverview. Something must be done. Extreme measures had to be taken.

When Ms. Connerly got home, she didn't hesitate in phoning

the lounge at the Dovey Hotel. After some hemming and hawing with the bartender, she was able to talk to Ray. She identified herself and told him she required his services.

"Corner table at the back and five grand," he said, and hung up.

Two days later she walked into the seedy lounge of the Dovey Hotel. It was deserted. The bartender looked up from his crossword puzzle at the strong, spare woman with silvery blonde hair who was so out of place. She avoided his stare. A lecher! She looked around carefully, and then she saw him. The lone customer of this hole, smelling of stale beer and staler smoke, met the description. There at the back of the lounge at a corner table sat a man with a moon-shaped face and eighteen strands of hair vainly plastered across his shiny dome. He was dressed casually in jeans and an old woollen sweater. She judged him to be in his mid-thirties and pegged him as a dropout and trouble-maker.

For a moment, but only a moment, she thought of turning around and forgetting the whole thing. Those entrusted with the care of the young didn't make such plans. But she'd gone to the trouble of making the withdrawal from her bank and Ms. Connerly was a firm

woman. Once she made a decision, she stuck to it. So she raised her head firmly, marched over to the man's table, and sat down without being invited.

He looked up from a greasy pad on which he was doodling. "Miss Connerly?" he said, barely acknowledging her.

"Ms. Connerly," she replied, and looked around nervously. It was possible that an ex-student could enter any minute, but except for the bartender, engrossed with his crossword puzzle, the bar remained deserted.

"Wanna drink?"

"No. No, thank you. I would like to get this business over as quickly as possible, then be on my way."

"Suits me." He continued with his doodling. "Who you want killed?"

"You say that so casually," she said in astonishment. "How do you know I'm not an undercover police officer?"

"You can smell 'em a block away. Besides, cops don't have chalk smudges on the sides of their dresses."

She didn't blink. "I see."

"Now that we've got that over with, who you want killed?"

She swallowed. "A pupil in my grade six class." It sounded utterly absurd.

The man looked up and whistled through yellow teeth. "A kid! You didn't make that clear

on the phone. You want me to ice a kid?"

"Yes, a slimy little brat."

"Jeez! A little kid, eh?"

"He's almost as tall as I am," she said defensively, and felt foolish. "Just say no if you do not want to do it, and I will leave."

She was half hoping the man would back out of the proposed deal, but he held up a hand. "No, no, take it easy, take it easy. Don't be in a rush. I didn't say I ain't gonna do it. It's just that I've never iced a kid. At least not one so young." He took a bemused pull from a flat beer in front of him. "Who knows, might be fun. What's this kid called?"

Tight-lipped, she told him the name.

He studied her for a moment. "What's he done to deserve bein' killed?"

She told him and again felt foolish.

"All these little things add up," she said lamely.

"I see," he said thoughtfully. "When you want it done?"

"I will leave that up to you." Then she hesitated before asking what had to be asked. "By the way, how—how—will you—do it?"

He laughed. "What's the diff?"

"I'm not sure. Will it be a—stabbing? A shooting?"

He raised his eyebrows in indignation. "Nothin' clumsy like

a stickin' or a shootin', Miss Connerly."

"Ms."

"Ms. Connerly. Kids usually buy it in dumb accidents. He could break his neck, for instance, by fallin' down a flight of stairs at school."

Ms. Connerly was horrified. "Not at school!" she gasped. "I don't want you to come to school. I might be connected."

"Re-lax. Just talkin' off the top of my head. I'll probably get him with my car when he's crossin' the street. There's a lot of pedestrian deaths in winter when the streets are slippery. It'll be somethin' boring like that."

"Boring?"

"Yeah, boring. I've done a couple of car jobs, and you gotta leave fast. There ain't much enjoyment in it."

Nervously she fingered a stray wisp of silver hair. Her poise was deserting her. "You—you actually enjoy it?"

His thin mouth turned up in a smile. "Yeah, I do. It's poetic."

"Poetic!" The man gave her chills. "I don't think we need go into that."

"You asked, Miss Connerly."

"Ms., and that was a mistake on my part," she said stiffly. "All we have left to discuss is the money part of it, I think."

He shrugged. "I told you my fee."

Ms. Connerly opened her

purse and handed him the envelope. "There is five thousand dollars in there. All I require from you is a good job, and I never want to see or to hear from you again. Do we have an agreement?"

The man bared his yellow teeth. "You got it, Ms. Connerly."

Monday morning came and Kevin's seat was empty.

Just as she was about to mark him absent in her register—the moron had brought it on himself, she rationalized—he bounced noisily into the room.

Late again.

"Sorry, Ms. Connerly," he said cheerfully, obviously not sorry at all. "I'm at my aunt's house for a while, and the bus wasn't on time."

That day he had to go to the bathroom five times, spat at a girl during the lunch hour, and threw an eraser across the room that just barely missed her. She didn't keep him in after school to do lines. There was a far greater punishment awaiting him.

He was also there on the next day. Late again.

She had to stop the math lesson while he noisily took off his coat, sat down at his desk, finally, and took a long time trying to find his notebook.

If looks could kill, he'd be dead fifty times over.



Kevin had a typical day. She had to speak to him several times about his misbehavior and his constant gum-chewing. It couldn't be proved, but she was certain it was he who had left a large, disgusting wad in the drinking fountain.

It was about time the contract was fulfilled. She was running out of patience.

That night she phoned the Dovey Hotel lounge.

"Sorry, I haven't seen him for a few days," said the bartender.

Kevin was there again the next day.

Just as she was heading for the staff room at noon, he approached her and offered her a cookie from his lunch bag.

"No, thank you," she said coldly.

"You sure, Ms. Connerly?" he said, and she thought she detected a mock subservience in his tone. "It's oatmeal. Aunt Flo made them last night."

"I said no, thank you."

"Go ahead, try it. I've got three more."

She gave him a look full of hatred. "No, thank you."

Then she lowered her voice.

"Are you deaf as well as being a hopeless lout and a mental blackout? I don't want anything from you with your grubby hands."

"Well, what've you been up to at school, Kevin, since I've been in L.A.?" asked his father.

"I wanna quit."

"Quit! Don't be ridiculous. You can't quit. You're not old enough."

"Can I go to another school?"

"Why?"

"That old bag Connerly. She's a witch. I told you before, she really hates my guts. I've tried to be nice to her. I really have. I offered her a cookie, and do you know what she said?"

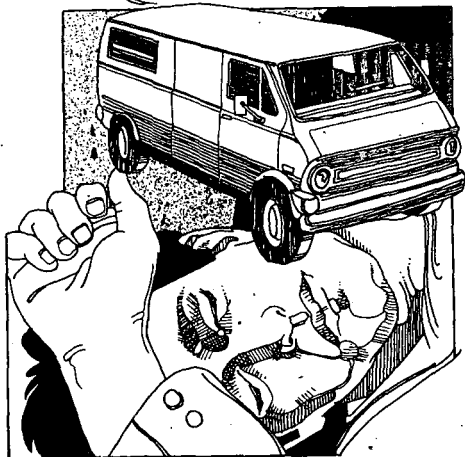
"What?"

"She called me a hopeless lout and a mental blackout. She called me a filthy, stinking creep, too."

His father's yellow teeth showed in a gash of an ugly grin. "Hard to believe. Guess I'll have to meet her."

"You'll hate the old bag. She'd like to kill me."

His father's moon-shaped face suddenly became serious and thoughtful. "Yeah," he mused. "Anyway, make yourself a grilled cheese sandwich for dinner. Got to go out. There's some urgent business I gotta take care of in Point Grey. I'll be back soon. It's just routine trouble-shootin' and won't take long."



# The Case Of The Cop And The Drop

by James A.  
Noble

**I**t was mid-afternoon by the time Police Captain John Evert returned to his office from the funeral. He dropped heavily into his chair and tossed his glasses onto the desk. At the

*Illustration by George Thompson*

moment he felt much older than his fifty-eight years.

Could there be a crime that exhibits more defiance for law, order, and justice, he wondered.

At least it wasn't one of his

own police officers. He knew how Captain Lemar of the Fourth Precinct must have felt. Evert had been in the same boat himself . . . too many times. So when Lemar asked for his assistance in solving the murder of one of his patrolmen, he had lent him his best detective, Sergeant Mark Murphy.

"I can save this until later."

Captain Evert looked up with a start. Mark was standing at the office door, holding a large cardboard box. "Huh? No, come in. My thoughts were elsewhere."

"I guess that's why you didn't hear me knock," said Mark, setting the box on a chair along the wall.

"Does this involve the murder of Officer Samuel Walters?"

Mark nodded. "Interesting policeman, Walters. Did you know much about him?"

"Only what Captain Lemar told me. Good cop on a beat. Lots of street savvy. A little too independent sometimes."

"Did he tell you Walters might have been gathering information on his own about some of the rackets on his beat?"

Evert raised an eyebrow. "No, he didn't. For what purpose I wonder?"

"I have a video tape here that might answer that question."

"That's the department's new video recorder; isn't it?"

"Yeah. I borrowed it from the lab." Mark pulled some cables from the box and connected the unit to a small portable television the captain kept in one corner of his office.

Evert spotted a plastic model van in the box. He reached over and pulled it out for a better look. "Reverting back to your childhood, Marcus?"

The detective looked up from his work. "Try not to break it," he said, ignoring the sarcasm. "I'll need all the visual aids I can get to explain this mystery to you."

"Visual aids? Huh. And I thought it was a toy truck. You're not implying I need a special demonstration just to follow your logic in this case? I used to be a hotshot detective like you at one time . . . only a little classier."

Mark laughed. "Yeah, I remember you telling me a couple of hundred times."

The captain set the model on his desk. "Did you get the cooperation from Captain Lemar's precinct you wanted?"

"No problem. He's only interested in discovering who murdered one of his men."

"Fill me in."

Mark finished the hookup, slid a chair next to the desk, and sat down. "Officers Gary Turk, James Montgomery, and Samuel Walters were all pa-

trolmen at the Fourth Precinct. None of them had any experience in surveillance. Because of manpower shortage and the limited amount of time to act, Captain Lemar was forced to use the three untrained men."

"How did time affect his decision?"

Mark pulled some police report forms from the box and flipped through them. "At two o'clock on Wednesday, the desk officer at the Fourth received an anonymous phone tip. There would be a big syndicate payoff at three that day. A drop was going to be used, a green trash barrel sitting on the west side of Oceania Park along Alcot Boulevard.

"Since all his detectives were out, Captain Lemar grabbed Turk, Montgomery, and Walters, gave them a quick lesson in stakeouts and the use of one of the precinct's video cameras, and sent them off in their surveillance van to tape the payoff.

"During the course of the stakeout, Montgomery left to tail the guy who made the drop. Later, Turk left to follow a suspected pickup man. Turk eventually apprehended his man, but the payoff money wasn't on him. He had the guy taken to the station while he was driven back to the park. When he arrived, shortly before ten that evening, he found Samuel Wal-

ters in the rear of the closed van with a knife in his back. The coroner figures he had been murdered soon after Turk had left the van.

"Walters' service revolver had been fired and was lying next to his body. Paraffin tests on his clothing and the interior of the van indicate he definitely fired his gun at something or someone while inside the vehicle."

Evert frowned. "Where was Montgomery all this time?"

"On the other side of town. He tailed the drop man for several hours. When it appeared he wasn't going to uncover any additional information by observing his activities, he phoned his station for a backup and arrested the guy."

"Do we know the names of the two men they arrested?" asked the captain.

"The drop man was Andy Bennett, a well-known syndicate gofer. The other guy is a William Clinesdale from the south side. Works for Cardian Research on Long Island. Definitely not a heavy. No record of priors."

"Either of them talking?"

"Bennett is a real wise guy," said Mark. "He admits he put a package of money in the trash barrel. Says he had a bunch of old dirty money lying around his flat, so he wrapped it up and was throwing it away. Lemar

had nothing to hold him for. Syndicate lawyers have already sprung him.

"Clinesdale claimed he was in the park waiting for a friend. Since Turk didn't find the money on him, they had to let him go, too."

"Do all your cases start off this well?"

"It gets worse. What makes this case particularly difficult to solve is what's on the video tape and the nature of the surveillance van. I'll explain the van first." Mark opened the rear doors on the toy van and pointed inside.

"As you can see, I wedged a piece of cardboard between the cab and the rear section of the van where the video camera and recorder would be. It represents a steel partition that exists in the real vehicle. A small screened opening in the partition allows the driver and the surveillance team in the rear to communicate with each other.

"I've painted four squares on this model to indicate where each of the darkened glass windows were located, one on each side of the van and one on each of the double rear doors. Taping is normally done through one of these windows. None of them can be opened.

"The double rear doors represent the only access to the aft

section of the van. They are secured by a spring-loaded lock. A key must be used each and every time anyone wishes to get in from the outside, unless of course there is someone inside to unlatch the doors.

"The important point to keep in mind is there isn't a single opening in the rear of the van that would allow even a bullet to pass through, let alone a man, once the rear doors are closed."

"What about ventilation?" asked Captain Evert.

"Two covered fans in the roof. Both have the same heavy, fine-mesh screening that covers the opening in the partition. None of the screens can be removed."

Evert shook his head. "Why do I get the distinct impression you're about to present me with a 'locked room' mystery . . . or should I say 'locked van'?"

Mark grinned. "Because I am. Obviously you've started reading mysteries like I suggested."

"And I know you don't have a 'locked' anything yet," countered the captain.

"You don't have all the facts, either. First, there were no bullet holes inside the van, in spite of the fact that Officer Walters discharged his gun while in the rear of the van.

"Second, there were only three keys involved. The ignition key, which Montgomery admits

having left in the cab of the truck, and two keys that fit the spring-loaded lock on the rear doors. Montgomery and Turk each had one of the keys to the rear doors in their possession when they left the van to tail their suspects. Walters never had such a key.

"Last, there is the matter of the video tape."

Mark reached over, snapped on the television, and started the video recorder. The screen flickered for an instant, then settled. The image was that of someone holding a small chalkboard in front of the camera. On it was written an investigation number, a date, the location, and a time, "3:01 P.M."

"That's Walters holding the chalkboard," commented Mark. "I can tell by the ring on his hand. According to Turk's report, he and Walters were in the rear of the van while Montgomery was up front in the cab."

The chalkboard was removed. A park bench was being taped from across a two-way street divided by a large median strip. Next to the bench was a green trash barrel. Except for an occasional car passing by, the only movement in the scene was provided by a stout man in a tweed blazer who removed a brown package from an attache case and

dropped it into the trash barrel.

"And that is Andy Bennett," observed the captain. "I recognize him."

"Right. And that's Montgomery crossing in front of the camera to tail him. That left just Turk and Walters in the rear compartment of the van."

What followed was several wide-angle views of the same scene with the familiar chalkboard preceding each one. In each case, someone stopped to throw some sort of debris in the trash barrel or paused long enough nearby to cause Turk and Walters to do some taping, but no one removed anything from the barrel. In one shot, a stray mongrel who obviously preferred trash barrels to fire hydrants was taped.

Captain Evert shook his head. "Captain Lemar should get better training for his stakeout teams."

"Watch the next taping," said Mark. "It's the important one."

Again, the chalkboard was held up in front of the camera. The time written on it indicated it was six fourteen P.M. When it was removed, a tall, lanky fellow wearing dark glasses and a raincoat with the collar turned up could be seen nervously pacing around the barrel. Whenever a car passed or a pedestrian walked by, he jumped back from the barrel and tried to appear

nonchalant. Eventually he became so intent on avoiding observation that he backed into the trash barrel and knocked it over.

"And maybe the syndicate should get better training for their pickup men," interjected Evert.

"That's William Clinesdale," said Mark. "No syndicate connections there."

As the camera zoomed in, Clinesdale could be seen kneeling down and tossing the spilled debris back into barrel. Occasionally he lifted his head to see if anyone was watching. Then he unbuttoned his raincoat as if to hide something inside it. After righting the barrel, he took off at a rapid walk, still craning his neck every which way to see if he had been spotted.

"Now, there's a complete nin-compoop," remarked the captain.

"There goes Turk to follow him," said Mark as another figure passed in front of the camera. "Now Walters is alone."

The closeup of the barrel remained on the screen for several seconds.

"And he forgot to turn off the camera," added Evert.

Suddenly Walters' back could be seen as he crossed the street and approached the barrel. He began pulling rubbish from it

and tossing it on the ground.

"What was he doing? Checking to see if Clinesdale took the package?" asked the captain.

Mark reached over and turned off the recorder. "Let's pause a moment and reflect. What's the main advantage of having a rubbish barrel in a park as a drop point, particularly for money?"

The captain stared thoughtfully at the ceiling for a minute. "I can't think of any, to tell you the truth. Some vagrant is liable to pick through the trash and find the money, or the sanitation truck might show up and take the contents to the dump. At the least, it's likely to give the money an aroma depending on what else is in the barrel."

The detective grinned. "In other words, the money is likely to end up lost if the pickup man doesn't act quickly. That's actually an advantage if something goes awry. Any incriminating evidence is likely to disappear.

"What we have here is a 'quick drop.' The pickup man is usually nearby so he can quickly retrieve what was left for him."

Captain Evert shrugged. "So what happened to Clinesdale? According to the time on the chalkboard, it was nearly three hours before he picked up the cash."



Mark reached into the cardboard box and pulled out a plainly-wrapped brown package.

"What's that?" asked the captain.

"It's the payoff money. Twenty thousand dollars."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the trash barrel. Right where Andy Bennett put it. William Clinesdale never picked it up because he never knew anything about it. He didn't take anything out of the barrel. The payoff wasn't for him.

"The real pickup man, who should have moved in right away after the drop was made, couldn't touch the barrel."

"Why not?" asked Evert.

"Because the real pickup man knew there was a police stakeout. He couldn't get his payoff as long as they were taping, but when his partners left, he had his chance."

"Only he forgot the recorder was still running, so now we have a tape of him getting his bribe. You're saying the payoff was intended for Sam Walters."

Mark nodded. "Think about it. Walters was starting to compile information about the illicit activities on his beat. Suppose the syndicate offered him a nice fat bribe to keep quiet about what little he knew. Now, imagine the syndicate setting Walters up.

"They make an anonymous phone call to the police, supplying details of the payoff. Then they send out a well-known gofer like Bennett to make the drop. They expect the police to catch Walters in the act of picking up the payoff.

"The police won't have a concrete motive for the bribe, but the mere suspicion of a bribe is enough to destroy a policeman. Walters will get suspended for being a cop on the take. Just what the syndicate wants. They're rid of a potential threat, and they won't have to pay any more hush money. What little he does know and spills won't harm them much. The only thing Bennett is guilty of is throwing money away in a trash can.

"Then there's a foul-up. Captain Lemar unwittingly puts Walters on the stakeout for his own payoff. Neither the syndicate nor Walters expected that.

"So Walters sits in the van with his two partners, wondering what to do. He knows that's his payoff out there in the barrel, but he doesn't know whether the anonymous phone call is a setup or just a syndicate leak. The only thing for certain is that he wants his money, and when Montgomery and Turk leave, he gets his chance."

"Except he forgot about the recorder and camera being on," added Evert.

"Oh, he remembered eventually. Watch," said Mark as he switched the video recorder back on. "Pay particular attention to his expression."

The television screen lit up and Walters could be seen rooting through the trash. Suddenly he whirled around and stared directly at the camera. His expression was one of both shock and realization. He hesitated and then walked back towards the van and out of the field of view.

Evert shook his head slowly. "Looks like you were right."

"Notice he didn't take the package from the barrel while the camera was still on," said the detective.

The scene of the deserted barrel with trash strewn around it remained visible for about thirty seconds, then started to drift off the left side of the screen. When the picture finally stopped moving, only one end of the park bench and a few passing cars could be seen. Mark switched off the video machine and the television. The screen went black.

For a moment, Captain Evert was confused. "He moved the van! But why . . . ?" Then a big grin appeared on his face.

"I have the answer," stated Evert emphatically. "But I have to know one thing. Did the recorder and the camera in the

surveillance van have their own battery power?"

"Yep."

"So disconnecting the van's battery wouldn't stop the taping?"

"Correct," replied Mark.

"Then the answer is obvious," said Captain Evert. "Walters crossed the street to get his payoff. As he was searching through the barrel, he suddenly remembered the camera was still on and would tape him picking up his bribe."

"He returned to the van to shut the video system off, only then he had another problem. He had closed the rear doors and that set the spring-loaded lock. He was locked out."

"The only way he could keep from being taped was to start the van with the ignition key Montgomery had left behind and move it until the barrel was out of the camera's field of view."

"He could have waited until the tape ran out," suggested Mark, smiling slightly.

Captain Evert leaned over and looked at the tape on the video recorder. "What are you doing? Testing me? There's plenty of tape left. Walters couldn't wait. He was afraid Montgomery or Turk might return before it ran out and he could fetch his money."

"Or maybe he could have cov-

ered the window . . . or broken it out," continued Mark, unrelenting.

"Covered it with what? And if that glass is like the stuff on our van, it's shatterproof. Either of those actions would have been observed by a dozen witnesses. Besides, the tape clearly shows he moved the van. Quit trying to outwit the old master."

Mark wouldn't give in. "He could have moved the barrel out of the field of view just as easily."

Evert snorted. "It probably never occurred to him. Anyway, how would he explain that action when Captain Lemar saw the tape?"

"I'll ask you a similar question," said Mark. "How was he going to explain moving the van?"

"He must have planned on Montgomery or Turk's returning and unlocking the rear doors. Then he would have a chance to destroy or hide the tape."

"Well, you seem to have all the answers," said Mark in mock resignation. "I bet you can even explain how Walters' body got into the locked van, and why, even though he discharged his gun inside, there's no bullet hole."

"There had to be another key."

Mark shook his head. "Nope."

"Then either Montgomery or Turk must have gone back to the van. Or maybe one of them slipped a key to an accomplice as he was leaving the area. They're involved somehow."

"Wrong again," responded the young detective. "Both men have solid alibis and witnesses. They were a considerable distance away when Walters was killed. Montgomery still had his key, and he never returned to the van. Turk was driven back to the park in a patrol car, and the officer who drove him there swears they didn't stop anywhere along the way. He clearly saw Turk remove his key from his pocket and unlock the rear doors when Walters didn't respond to his knock. They found Walters inside. He had been dead for nearly three hours by that time."

Captain Evert sat speechless.

Mark chuckled. "Just when I thought you were learning something from reading all those mysteries, you turn around and violate one of their basic premises."

"What's that?"

"Never trust the obvious answer that's too easily derived. And certainly never make assumptions based on such an answer."

"So suddenly I have Confucius for a detective sergeant,"

cracked Evert. "Okay, what's the correct solution?"

Mark looked at his watch. "Boy, I tell you. All this long-winded explanation has sure made my throat dry. And it's quitting time, too. Help me pack this stuff away, and we'll go down to Kelly's for a beer."

Captain Evert sighed deeply.

"Your treat," added Mark.

"Ah, come on. I'll collapse from curiosity by then. How about a clue?"

"Okay, I'll tell you what. You have all the information you need to get a pretty good idea of what really happened. If you can answer a couple of questions and tie the answers together, you'll be able to think this one out.

"First and most important, why did Walters really move the van?

"Second, if Clinesdale wasn't a pickup man, what was he doing? Remember what I told you about the 'quick drop,' by the way.

"Finally, if you can answer the first question, you should be able to figure out how I got a positive I.D. of the murderer.

"Oh, and bring the toy truck. It'll help in the explanation."

**K**elly's was packed as usual, but the table where Mark and the captain normally sat

was empty. The two had been coming to Kelly's so long and so regularly that an unwritten rule had arisen among the clientele: "Leave Captain John Evert's (and his friend's) table alone at quitting time."

"Thank you again, as always," said Mark, grinning as the captain set the mugs of beer on the table.

"That's all right. Beats giving you a raise. Cheers."

They drank together under the watchful eye of Kelly, who immediately had two more drafts sent over.

"And now, back to our story," said Evert when their empty mugs hit the table.

"Let's start with William Clinesdale," began Mark. "We know he wasn't the pickup man because I found the money still in the trash barrel and we both know it was intended for Walters. But he was definitely hiding some action with his coat, if you remember what we saw on the tape. That made me suspect he might be making a drop."

"You mean two drops were being made at the same spot?"

"Right. So after I located the package with the money in it, I searched the barrel a little more carefully and found this." Mark reached inside his jacket and pulled out an envelope. From it he removed a small,

rectangular piece of plastic with several wires leading from it. He set it on the table.

"A computer chip?" ventured Evert.

"Close enough. It's called a VLSI encryption microchip. It scrambles sensitive communications and data for transmission purposes. It's the latest and greatest from Cardian Research where Clinesdale works. Foreign unfriendlies would pay a fortune for it.

"But what Clinesdale put into the barrel is not as important to us as where the pickup man for this little jewel probably was."

"You said to remember the trash barrel was a 'quick drop.' So Clinesdale's pickup man was probably close by."

Mark nodded. "But before he could get the chip, Walters left the van and started searching through the barrel. Walters was looking for the money, not a microchip, but Clinesdale's pickup man didn't know that.

"When he saw Clinesdale being followed and Walters emerge from the van to search the barrel, he must have thought Walters and Turk were federal agents about to ruin his plans. Even so, he wanted that microchip. That brings us to the real reason Walters moved the van. You brought the model with you?"

"Right here," said Evert, pulling the toy van from his overcoat pocket and putting it on the table.

Mark opened the rear doors. "First, Walters opened the doors to leave the van. Let's suppose he left the doors slightly ajar." Mark moved the doors until they were barely open.

"Then the lock wouldn't have latched."

"Correct." Mark slid his beer mug up against the rear of the model van. "Now, suppose another vehicle pulled up close behind. How then could Walters swing the doors open so he could re-enter the van and turn off the video recorder?"

Captain Evert slapped his hand on the table. "Of course. He'd have to move the van forward."

"Right. And who would be likely to park a car so close that Walters would be delayed in reaching the safety of the back of the van?"

"Clinesdale's pickup man."

"Right again," affirmed Mark. "On the tape, Walters appeared to return to the van empty-handed. But this microchip is a small item. The pickup man must have thought Walters had it. After Walters moved the van forward and was climbing through the rear doors, the pickup man raced out from a nearby hiding place and stabbed

him in the back. Before he died, Walters must have drawn his gun as he fell into the van and fired at his assailant through the open rear doors. Then he pulled them shut.

"The pickup man, thinking the microchip was locked in the van and realizing the shot had probably attracted attention, decided to make his escape."

"But who was the pickup man?" asked the captain. "You said you had a positive identification of Walters' murderer."

"I do," replied Mark, taking a photo from his pocket. "Here's his picture. His name won't mean anything to you, but the fact that he's in the import/export business and travels to many foreign countries might."

Captain Evert looked at the photo of a man sitting in the driver's seat of a car. "Where'd you get this?"

"Walters got it for me. Remember, the murderer pulled his car in behind the van. Apparently he didn't realize the video recorder was still running, and on that divided highway there was only one direction he could go to make his getaway. Right by the van and the camera. This photo was taken

from the video tape."

Mark pointed to a spot on the photo. "See that hole in the hood of the car, right below the windshield? That's your missing bullet hole. That's what Walters hit when he fired through the open rear doors."

The captain shook his head. "Well, what do you know?"

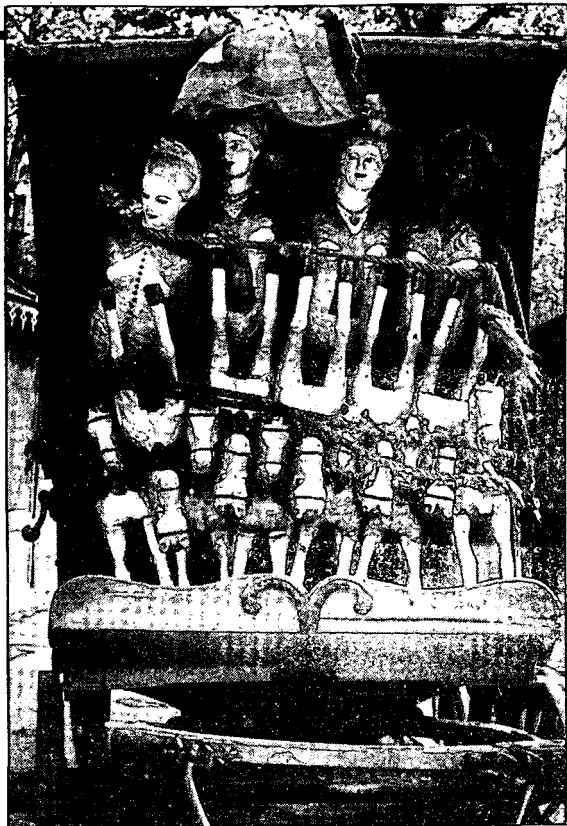
Mark finished his beer before he spoke again. "You know, Samuel Walters was a good officer. He may have had a reputation for ignoring the rules and bypassing his superiors, but he got things done. I believe it's possible he was eventually going to use the bribe as evidence against the syndicate."

"I catch your drift," said Captain Evert. "The proper authorities will have to know the true facts in this case, but as far as I can see, no one else need ever hear about the payoff."

Kelly had just come over with two fresh beers and was removing the empty mugs when suddenly he slammed one of the mugs down on the microchip Mark had left lying on the table. It shattered into tiny pieces.

"Damn cockroaches," he mumbled as he walked away.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Andre Kertesz

Is this The Case of the Kidnapped Mannequins? Or The Case of the Mannequins Who Kidnapped the Horses? Or . . . We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.



FICTION

# The Accident

by Robert Gray

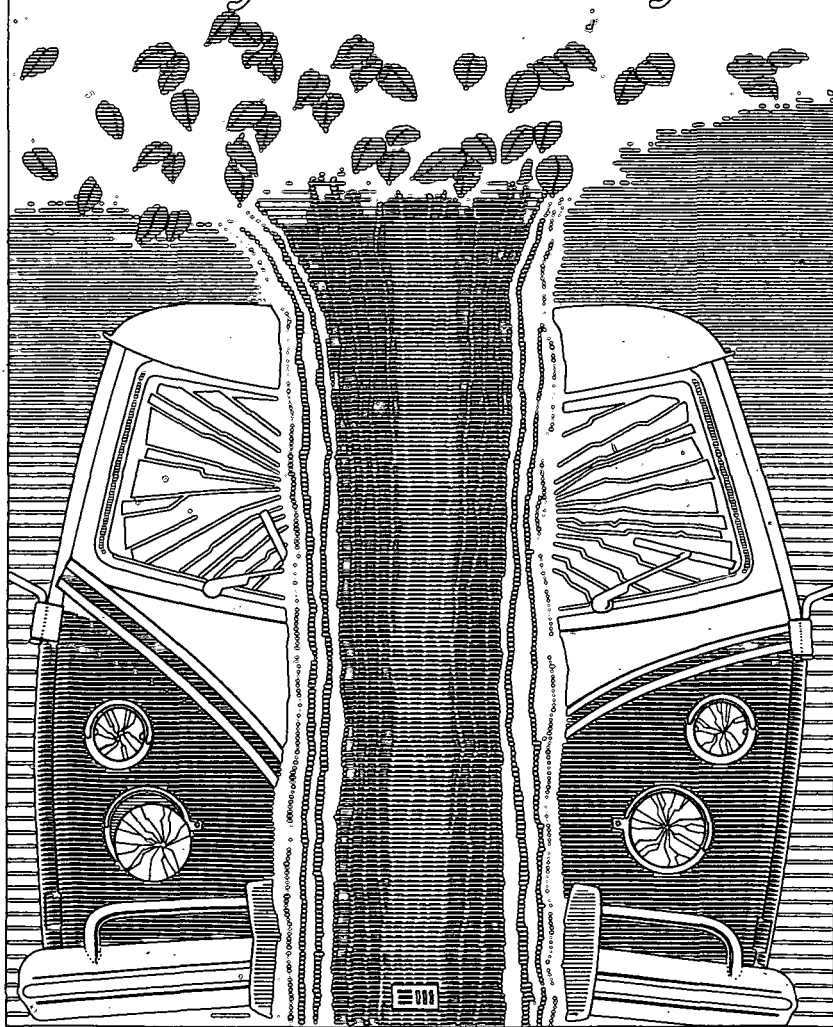


Illustration by Eric Marcus

**H**enri Cavanaugh was driving north on Route 9, holding his speed down because of dense fog drifting through the tall pines that flanked the highway. Now that darkness had settled over the area and the AM airwaves had cleared, he twisted the knob on his car radio to WNEW in New York and picked up Sinatra hitting all the right notes on "Strangers in the Night." Henri sang along.

He had spent most of the day in a smoky, airless, Off Track Betting parlor in Troy, researching an article he was going to write for a gambling magazine about the strange habits of some horse-players. He had wanted to find out why anyone would sit for hours in a closed room in the middle of August, listening to audio race calls and putting up with a state surcharge on his winnings, when the fresh air and live action of the Saratoga race-track were only thirty minutes away.

Of course, he could have just gone to Troy and asked a few questions for his own enlightenment. But in order to maintain his effectiveness as a private detective, he needed a halfway decent cover, especially since his license had expired years ago.

Henri had the windows rolled all the way down on the black

Mercedes sedan, a fruitless attempt at beating the humidity. He reminded himself for the hundredth time to get the air conditioner fixed soon. His sweat-soaked shirt felt as if it was melting between his skin and the leather upholstery. He concentrated on focusing all his attention on the road, as the fog cut his headlights' range to nil.

He had just topped a rise a few minutes south of Saratoga when flashing red lights in the oncoming lane ignited the shrouded darkness ahead. Slowing down, Henri waited until a state trooper waved at him to keep moving. He crawled past, looking between the two squad cars, and saw a vehicle off the road, bathed in spotlights and crushed against the thick trunk of a pine tree. Even in the fog, Henri recognized the sloppy paint job of the crumpled VW minibus.

Instead of accelerating, Henri pulled off the highway beyond three other cars already parked on the narrow right-hand shoulder. He got out of his car and trotted across the road, running awkwardly down a short embankment on the other side. A trooper walked over to block his approach.

"Sorry, sir, but we've got to keep the area clear. There's some gasoline spillage, and we can't take any chances."

"But I think I know the

driver," said Henri, starting around the cop, who moved quickly to cut him off again. "Is he hurt badly? Can you at least tell me what hospital he was sent to?"

The trooper hesitated about giving out information, then evidently changed his mind. "I'm afraid he's still in the vehicle, sir. He was apparently killed on impact, from what we can tell. It didn't happen very long ago. He'll have to be cut out of there. It's pretty messy."

Henri climbed back up to the highway. He noticed a young man talking with another trooper and waited nearby. When they were finished, Henri intercepted the kid as he was leaving.

"What happened?"

"Don't think I'm supposed to talk about it," he said, lighting a cigarette.

Henri pulled out his wallet and flashed his long-expired PI license. "It's okay kid. I knew the driver. My name's Cavanaugh. Now, what happened?"

"Didn't see it, man, like I told those guys. Came just after it went down."

"Were you the first one here?"

"No, two other guys were already over by the bus, trying to get the driver out, I guess."

"Where are they?" Henri asked, looking around. There were no other cars stopped now except his and the kid's. The

troopers were doing a better job of moving ambulance chasers along.

"They didn't hang around. When I showed up, they said they'd go call the cops. I guess when they did that they just kept going. I wasn't surprised. They looked kinda shady."

"How do you mean?"

"You know, like hoods . . . One of them was a little weasel of a guy, bald with real thick glasses, the kind you can't hardly see his eyes through. The other one was huge, a moose . . ."

"Were they white or black?"

"White."

"What were they driving?"

"A Caddy . . . pretty new, gold with white trim."

"Don't suppose you got the license number."

"Why should I?"

Henri frowned, but thanked the kid for his help. An ambulance and a firetruck arrived simultaneously; sirens wailing. There was a sudden flurry of increased activity as they descended on the bus. Henri wanted no part of this scene. He returned to his car and drove into Saratoga. He needed a drink.

Henri's reluctant eyes cracked open at eight A.M. Mercifully, Laura hadn't opened the bedroom drapes. Morning was not his favorite time of day.

Struggling out of bed and into the bathroom, he splashed cold water on his face and considered, then rejected, the idea of shaving. The tired eyes staring back at him from the mirror were surrounded by wrinkles on his forehead above and puffy bags underneath. His thick, gray-brown hair and mustache stuck out at odd angles where he had slept too long on his left side.

He was not a pretty sight.

The smell of fresh-perked coffee lured him downstairs. He pushed through the swinging door into the large kitchen. Laura, still in her bathrobe, was sitting at a small table in the breakfast alcove. Her bright red hair, long and morning tangled, fell to her shoulders and framed her pale, attractive face. Henri had decided recently that she reminded him of Vanessa Redgrave, with Lauren Bacall's voice. She had told him to stop watching so many movies on cable TV.

She was bathed in bright sun that streamed through the windows behind her. Outside, their flower garden and lawn seemed incandescent. Henri couldn't stand it.

"Morning, hon," said Laura.

"Mnunhh," he replied, shuffling across the floor, and, with superhuman effort, bending to kiss her forehead. He walked to the counter near the sink and

poured himself a cup of coffee. The radio next to the percolator was playing so-called popular music. Henri silenced it with a swipe at the on-off button. He returned to the table and collapsed in a chair opposite her.

"I didn't hear you come in last night," she said. "Were you in Troy all that time?"

Henri shook his head. He squinted, trying to see his wife, but all he could make out was a sun-wrapped silhouette. "Can't we turn off some of these lights," he groaned. "I was on my way home pretty early, but there was a bad accident just south of the city on Route 9. It was a kid who's worked for me a couple of times as an ear in the stables, a hotwalker named Timmy Baker. Remember him?"

Laura shook her head. "How come you took 9 instead of the Northway?"

"No reason. Sometimes I just don't feel like fighting the interstate speedballs. Nine gives me time to think. Anyway, Baker was a sharp one; had more deals going than anybody I ever saw. He must've been the highest paid hotwalker in track history, though not much of his salary came legally. Gave me some good leads on that jewelry heist we worked last year . . . for a price, of course."

"Is he dead?"

"They couldn't even pry him out of that mess. Had to wait

for one of those Jaws of Life machines to crack open his bus. I had no desire to be around for that, so I headed in and stopped at Jake's for a drink."

The telephone rang and Laura jumped up to answer it. She listened for a moment, then motioned for him to come over and take the call. He struggled to his feet. Taking the receiver from her, he held it away from his ear in case there was a screamer on the other end of the line.

"Yeah?"

"Mr. Cavanaugh?" said an obviously disguised voice. "I guess maybe you heard Tim Baker was killed last night. It was murder. He stole money, a lot, from the kind of people you don't cross. I know, 'cause I work for them, too. They run him off the road last night."

"Can we talk somewhere?" Henri asked, knowing it wasn't likely. The grating buzz of the dial tone was his answer.

**H**enri made a few calls and found out that Timmy Baker had been living in a rented house with five other guys in Saratoga's southeast corner, a long walk from the track. After breakfast, he and Laura decided to check the place out. It was a one story, slightly weathered ranch house on a quiet, residential street. The lawn

needed mowing. A child's play-gym was set up out back, evidence left behind by owners who had rented out their home for the month of August. Two swings moved gently in a light, pleasant breeze.

Laura pulled up to the curb, and they got out of the car. She was wearing a blue skirt, matching blazer, and white silk blouse. Her hair was tied back and looked shorter than it really was. Henri had thrown on a light brown suit. His tie was choking him and his hair still defied gravity. They both carried briefcases for appearance's sake.

Henri pressed the doorbell. He tried it several more times with no reply. They debated briefly whether to pick the lock or return later, but before they could come to a decision somebody yelled from inside that he was on his way.

The door swung open and a bleary-eyed, thin young man with long blond hair stood before them, wearing only a pair of gym shorts. He pushed his hair back from his forehead and looked at them suspiciously.

"Excuse me, but..." Laura began. She was cut off immediately.

"Look, you guys. I don't want no encyclopedias, no insurance, and no vacuum cleaners, understand?"

He started to close the door.

"Wait," said Henri. "We're not selling. In fact, we might be buying."

The kid hesitated. His sleepy eyes widened.

"Buying what?"

"Information."

He looked at the Cavanaughs with an expression that lay somewhere between puzzlement and mistrust. Henri explained.

"We're interested in finding out something about the young man who was killed last night; Timmy Baker. I understand he lived here."

"What of it? You guys cops?"

"No, nothing like that," Laura said. "Just friends of the family. They asked us to find out some things, that's all."

"Did I hear you say something about buying?"

Henri held out a twenty, but when the kid reached for it, he pulled it out of range.

"Awright, come in."

They entered the spacious living room. At least, Henri assumed there was supposed to be a living room buried somewhere under the mounds of newspapers, dirty clothes, and dishes. The walls, and even the ceiling, were smudged where filthy hands had leaned or where carelessly tossed balls had been thrown. Empty beer cans were stacked on the coffee table, and a dozen liquor bottles sprouted from the top of the television

set, which was turned on without sound. A grinning game show host moved his lips while frantic contestants ran around like Keystone Kops.

"Have a seat," said their host, waving in the general direction of a sofa where pillows, blankets, and a sleeping bag had been piled in a rumpled heap. Henri moved some of the stuff and sat next to Laura at one end. He introduced themselves, then asked the kid's name.

"My name's Jack, but most people call me Ice."

"Ice?" asked Laura.

He laughed. "Sounds tough, don't it? But it's only 'cause I'm always chewin' ice cubes while I work."

Ice went into the kitchen and poured himself the last dregs from a coffee-making machine. Mercifully, he didn't offer any to his guests. Based upon what could be seen of the kitchen from where he was sitting, Henri thought it might be in even worse shape than the living room. More beer cans were piled on the counter. A couple had fallen to the floor and been crushed underfoot. Three or four open cookie packages and a loaf of bread surrounded the coffee machine.

Returning to the living room, Ice stopped by the television set and poured a shot of bourbon in his cup. Then he walked over to an armchair, brushed away

some *Racing Forms* on the seat, and flopped down, spilling some of the potent brown liquid on his hand. He wiped it off on the chair.

"About that twenty," he said.

Henri tossed it to one of the few clear spaces on the table that separated them. Ice did not reach for it.

"What do you want to know about Baker?"

"Whatever you can tell us."

"Not much. There's six of us here now, but I only knew one guy coming in and he moved. Said we lived like pigs, if you can believe it. All of us work in the barns, and that's how we got together. I mean, a grand for the month's rent is pretty stiff if you don't split it up. This way, we all get out for a couple hundred bucks. But, like I said, all we do is eat and sleep here. Baker roomed with me after my buddy split, but I don't think we saw each other five minutes a day to talk. Even then, he didn't have much to say. He was here less than anybody. Always on the move, that kid."

"What do you do in the barns, Ice?" Henri asked, knowing that morning was prime time for stable help. It had been a long shot coming over to the house in the first place. Henri had hoped, but not really expected, that one or more of these guys would be at home.

"Oh, you know, the usual

... hotwalker, muck out stalls, like that. Only the funny thing is, some days I seem to get this weird kind of flu, like today, for instance. But I do feel better every minute. What time is it anyway?"

- Laura glanced at her watch. "Nine fifteen."

"Yeah, I definitely think I'll be fully recovered soon. Hey, why's everybody so interested in Baker's accident anyway?"

"Everybody?" Henri asked.

Ice saw opportunity knock and said no more. He grinned. Henri sighed and dropped another twenty on the coffee table.

"Oh, I forgot to mention that two guys were here earlier. They asked the same kinds of questions you did, wanted to go through Baker's stuff. I asked if they had a warrant, but they said they weren't cops either, just friends of the family like you guys. Baker's family sure has a lot of strange friends."

"What did they look like?"

"Laurel and Hardy. One huge, one little. Little guy was bald, had glasses. Both of them wore nice threads. Don't know why they'd care about a punk like Baker. Drove a Caddy, real sweet machine."

"Gold and white?"

"Yeah, how'd you know?"

"Was anybody else living here more of a friend to Baker than you?"



"Uh-uh, no way. Like I said, he was hardly ever around. Used to go back to New York every Tuesday, his day off. He'd stay and not come back till real early Wednesday morning, just before work. And most nights he drove down to Albany or Troy, somewhere down there. Don't know why. Guess he had a honey."

"Baker's belongings, where would we look?" asked Henri, flashing another twenty.

Ice looked at the bill, then at Henri. He shook his head and smiled. "It sure pays to get sick once in a while, but I'm sold out, man. Those two other guys took all of Baker's stuff with them, and their pay scale was a lot higher than yours, let me tell you."

Henri dropped the twenty on top of the others and said they'd like to see the room anyway. It was one of three small bedrooms down a narrow hallway. Twin beds occupied most of the space. There was one closet and a footlocker. At first glance, they knew which side was Baker's; the one that was relatively neat and stripped of most signs of habitation. Ice's area looked like the rest of the house.

"Henri, look at this," said Laura, who had turned back the covers of the unmade bed while he was checking the closet. The mattress had been slashed

and pulled apart. "They were certainly looking for something. Wonder if they found it?"

Ice shook his head. "Don't think so. They seemed awful mad when they left."

Satisfied that nothing had been left behind, Henri and Laura returned to the living room and headed toward the front door. Ice sat down in his chair again and stared vacantly at the television.

"Pleasure doing business with you folks," he said just before they closed the door.

The Cavanaughs were in the spacious study that was elegantly overqualified to serve as their office. A blazing afternoon sun was muted by the room's four stained glass windows and drenched the area in soft blue light.

Laura sat behind the oak desk and Henri slumped in one of the two leather client's chairs in front, slowly leafing through his favorite cookbook-encyclopedia, *Larousse Gastronomique*. He was simultaneously plotting their dinner's course and thinking about the case.

This was what they called brainstorming. Laura, with pen and notepad in hand, would talk out various aspects of a problem with Henri. She would then jot down connecting lines of thought as they went along.

So far, she had filled a whole page with an elaborate doodle surrounding the word "Baker."

"How about this?" said Henri, breaking what had become a long, fallow silence. "Did you know that the flesh of an ostrich can't be eaten by Jews and Moslems? And—good God—an average ostrich yields sixty pounds of meat. I wonder if . . ."

"Henri, you said that Tim Baker was a sharp one. Our friend Mr. Ice called him a punk. Could he be both?"

He closed the heavy book and rested it on his lap. "A lot of those kids in the stables are kind of hardnosed. You saw some of it in Ice. Comes with the territory, I suppose. You grow up in the city and hang around with other punks, I guess you have to develop an attitude or they'll eat you alive. Baker was like the rest of them in many ways, but he also had a natural intelligence, a kind of smarts that didn't come from books or the street. It kept him a step ahead of his buddies, but it also probably introduced him to a different class of punk, like our two friends in the Caddy. Maybe he wasn't quite good enough to deal with them."

"What do you think they were looking for? Drugs?"

Henri shook his head. "Baker hated the drug scene. He liked being in control too much, and with drugs you're never in con-

trol, whether using or selling. He had more than his share of vices, but I don't think he would've changed overnight."

"Nice friends you have, dear. Why do you think he went to the city every week, or am I wrong in thinking that's unusual?"

"It's strange, all right. Most of these kids stay up here through the whole thoroughbred meeting. They couldn't afford to go down even if they wanted to, which most of them don't."

"We could call his family."

"Wouldn't do any good. If he was close to them, they won't talk. If he wasn't, they won't care."

Henri shifted to a more comfortable position. "You know, the thread that connects the accident with something in the house is that Cadillac and those two characters who own it. They must have been searching the bus last night when that kid thought they were trying to get the driver out. The question is, what did Baker have that they wanted so badly?"

Laura tore the top page off her notepad and wrote "goons/punk/not drugs/accident/Cadillac" on the new sheet. She circled the words three times, then glanced up at her husband.

"Cash?"

Henri nodded thoughtfully. "I was just coming to that conclusion myself. But where would

Baker get his hands on the kind of serious money that would interest those guys?"

The phone rang and Laura answered it. Jeffry Dalton was on the other end of the line. He often worked undercover for the Cavanaughs. A twenty-year-old ex-jockey and would-be actor, with a natural gift for disguises, he was equally at ease among stablehands and theater crowds in Saratoga. Henri had called him earlier that morning, after getting a list of Timmy Baker's housemates, and Jeffry had spent a couple of hours looking them up at the track.

Laura listened for several minutes, occasionally scribbling something on the pad. Henri returned to his culinary studies. When she hung up, he looked at her expectantly.

She shook her head and frowned. "Don't get your hopes up, dearest. They told Jeffry the same story Ice gave us. Evidently Mr. Baker was not an easy person to know."

Henri yawned, closed the book and laid it on the desktop. "Looks like that Caddy is our only hope. The problem is finding the damn thing. I guess I'd better get dinner going now. It's going to be another long night."

**T**here are more than forty motels in Saratoga. Beyond the city limits, but within easy driving dis-

tance, are hundreds more. Henri didn't like the odds, and that wasn't even counting the possibility that his quarry might have rented a house, or gone out to dinner or to the Performing Arts Center or the harness track or . . .

Despite all that, Henri left shortly after dinner to see if he could turn up a gold and white Caddy. (Unable to locate a pair of nice ostrich steaks at the Grand Union, he had settled for veal cutlets, which he burned while thinking of other things.)

Beginning at the north end of the city, he checked out every parking lot and nearly every street. On two occasions, in restaurant lots, he found cars that almost fit the description. Hoping he might have been slightly misinformed, Henri waited for the owners to appear, but each time it was an elderly couple. He decided he couldn't have been that misinformed.

After three hours of wandering, he was nearing downtown for what seemed like the thousandth time, making the swing along Circular Street past the Batcheller House, an elaborate, three story pastry of a home frosted with numerous balconies, gables, and a high tower capped by a lighted minaret. He kept thinking about the stupidity of his plan, which had seemed at least plausible earlier. Maybe tomorrow, he thought as he

drove through the rear parking lot of the Holiday Inn on his way to Broadway.

But sometimes you just get lucky. Making the left turn around the motel into the north side parking section, where a stone stairway on the right dropped sharply down to the shabbier end of Congress Park, Henri spotted the car. It was parked in a space that had been empty on the other two occasions when he had cut through the lot.

Henri pulled into a space nearby and went inside the motel. The corridors and lobbies were filled with people having a hell of a lot more fun than he was. He walked up to the main desk, and a pretty girl with a nice tan smiled.

"May I help you, sir?"

"Yes, I hope so," Henri replied, trying to appear upset. "I'm afraid I backed into one of your guests' cars outside. It's just a little dent in the fender, but I'd like to let him know about it and make some arrangement for compensation."

"Do you have the license number?"

Henri gave her a slip of paper. She left the counter for a few minutes to talk with another girl working nearby. They checked through some registration cards, then made a phone call. When she returned, she told him that the owner, a Mr.

Sullivan, would send someone right down. Henri thanked her and stood aside as a woman behind him stepped up to the counter. When the girl's attention was diverted to the new customer, he slipped outside.

From where he had parked, Henri blended in with other cars near him, but he still had a good view of the Caddy. He didn't have to wait long.

A man emerged from the building and walked over to the car. He was about six five, weighed in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty pounds, and wore dark trousers and a yellow sports shirt stretched tight over his bulky frame. He glanced around the area. Henri lowered himself farther in his seat until he was just able to peek over the dashboard. The man walked around the car, running his hand along the body to check for damage. When he was finished with his inspection, he scanned the lot again, shook his head, then went back inside.

Now Henri was sure he had found the right car. He started his engine, gently put it in gear, and pulled out of his space. Leaving the parking lot, he drove north and headed home.

**H**enri and Laura had their morning coffee in the study around ten o'clock. They had slept

late. Sitting behind the desk, Henri had just hung up the phone after talking with David McKerney, a state police detective who often, though reluctantly, worked with the Cavanaughs on Saratoga-related cases.

"Mac says that as far as the department's concerned, it was an accident, pure and simple. As usual, he's got more work than he can handle and doesn't want to hear about anything else. Also as usual, if we do turn up something, he wants to be contacted."

McKerney had long ago given up trying to discourage the Cavanaughs from their hobby. Since they never accepted a fee for their very confidential work, he couldn't really come down on them very hard for practicing without a license. And because he couldn't credit them publicly for the things they did, he was often rewarded for their success. Since they didn't seem to mind the arrangement, he had learned not to mind it, either.

"Did Mac get the information?" asked Laura.

"Yeah," Henri replied, consulting some notes he had scratched down on his pad. "The Caddy is registered to Arnold Sullivan, five seven, one hundred and forty pounds, fifty-one years old, brown hair, eyeglass restriction on his license. Born in Brooklyn, but now lives

in Florida in the winter and in Manhattan the rest of the year."

"What's his business? Must be lucrative."

Henri grinned. "Financial consultant, it says. That could mean anything you want it to. Offices also in Florida and Manhattan."

"Criminal record?"

"Three arrests, no convictions, for bad checks years ago. Nothing since."

Laura set her cup and saucer on the desk. She reached over for Henri's notepad, tore off the sheet he was using, then wrote "Sullivan/ consultant/ Florida/ Manhattan/ Saratoga/ Baker/ racing/money."

"Gambling?" she suggested, glancing at Henri. "A bookie?"

He shook his head. "I doubt that Sullivan would try to run something like that out of the Holiday Inn. Too many phone calls. He'd have a rented house or apartment, especially if he was running book to the extent that he could afford those addresses he's got."

Laura tapped her pen on the pad. "But there has to be a connection . . . financial consultant . . . Henri, what happens to all the cash that passes through this town from things like drug sales, prostitution, illegal gambling . . . They can't just open savings accounts or hide it in shoeboxes."

"I'm sure they don't. What

are you getting at?"

"What if our Mr. Sullivan was some kind of illegal middleman, doing his financial consulting for a less distinguished clientele? What's that word I'm looking . . . oh yes, laundering, money laundering."

"Where'd you pick that up?"

"Who knows? The six o'clock news, probably. What do you know about it?"

"In a word, nothing."

Laura added "laundering" to the list on her notepad, thought for a second, then put down "banker." "Today is Wednesday, isn't it? I think it would be a marvelous idea to have lunch with Mother. Care to join me?"

"I'll pass, thanks, What's on your mind all of a sudden, Laura?"

"A little hard information, dear."

**B**ecause it was such a glorious day, Laura walked the four blocks to her mother's house. The stately home would have been considered a mansion in most towns, but compared to many of its extravagant neighbors, it was just another run-of-the-mill stone castle.

Although Laura technically owned the house, as well as the one where she and Henri lived, she could never think of it as anything but her mother's place.

Agnes Woodward had signed virtually all of her fortune and possessions over to Laura almost fifteen years ago, prematurely anticipating her imminent death. She had loathed the thought of perverse inheritance taxes swallowing her estate and had insisted that Laura assume control of everything and live independently. Unfortunately, Henri had come along shortly thereafter and spoiled her dreams.

Ringling the doorbell because she didn't feel like walking around to the side entrance, Laura listened for the shuffling footsteps of Saunders, her mother's eighty-year-old butler. After a minute's delay, the door slowly opened and the frail old man stood in her path, squinting to focus his failing eyes on the caller.

"Hello, Saunders. Is Mother in?"

Laura proceeded down a long corridor to the rear of the house where an opaque glass door opened on the greenhouse, which had been built in the worst possible spot. The high walls of the house on one side, and a grove of pines on the other, afforded it only a few hours of sunshine each day in the middle of the summer, and none at all the rest of the year. A local florist had to come in at regular intervals to replace the plants, which had been chosen

for their lack of addiction to sunlight but which still suffered. Year round, it was the coolest greenhouse in the world.

Her mother was sitting bolt upright, despite her seventy-three years, on a white, wrought iron garden chair beside a matching table. Across from her, perched uncomfortably on another chair, was Simon Arthur, an Albany bank president in his late sixties. An old friend of the family, he had been courting Mrs. Woodward every Wednesday afternoon since Laura's father died twenty years ago.

Although she made regular visits to her mother's house, today she was here to see Mr. Arthur. After kissing them both on the cheek, Laura sat in a third chair and Mr. Arthur poured her a cup of tea from a silver service on the table.

"How are you, dear?" he said, shifting his considerable bulk as he turned to hand her the cup and saucer. "We don't see much of you any more."

Laura smiled. All her mother's friends said that to her. They'd been saying it for twelve years now, ever since she foolishly consented to marry that lowlife Henri Cavanaugh. There were, after all, social standards to maintain. A person should know her—and especially his—place in the scheme of things.

Mrs. Woodward held out her cup, and Mr. Arthur poured her a little more tea before he settled back in his chair.

"Laura mentioned to me this morning that she specially wished to visit with you, Simon."

"Really?"

Laura nodded and smiled. She knew her mother had interpreted this new interest as a sign that her daughter might finally be coming to her senses. "Yes, Mr. Arthur. This may sound a touch bizarre to you, but I was wondering if you might be able to tell me anything about illegal money laundering."

"Laura!" cried Mrs. Woodward.

Mr. Arthur laughed, his jowls dancing merrily under his clean shaven, pink face. "Have you been up to something naughty, Laura? Or has that husband of yours led you astray again?"

"Nothing bad, I assure you." She decided to tell a white lie rather than subject her mother to the painful truth. Laura was fairly certain her mother had heard a few stories from friends for whom the Cavanaugh's had performed discreet "favors" in the past, but it was never spoken of between them. "I've been teaching an evening course at Skidmore about investments, and the subject happened to come up. I promised my stu-



dents I'd get an expert's opinion."

"Teaching?" her mother asked, obviously forming an immediate image of evil Henri gambling away the family fortune while poor, desperate Laura had to get a job.

"Volunteer work, Mother."

"Oh, thank goodness."

He rubbed his hands together, apparently warming to the idea of a conversation about something other than art, opera, and cuisine (her mother's passions); a subject he could more easily sink his teeth into—cash flow.

"Well, Laura, let me see now," he began. He placed a finger lightly to his lips as he gathered his thoughts. "I guess I can tell you what I've read on the subject. My colleagues have been concerned with the problem for some time. As you say, it's called laundering, and it's a method by which illegally earned money is converted into legal assets. They estimate that this involves seventy to eighty billion dollars each year. Naturally, the principal culprits are drug dealers and gamblers, but evidently some corporations and businessmen also get involved as a tax dodge."

"How is it done exactly?"

"These criminals manage to have their ill-gotten gains legitimized by employing a professional launderer, who

runs it through foreign banks."

"You mean they just pack it up in suitcases and fly it out of the country?"

"I suppose a small operator could. There are any number of possible methods. I read where in one case a customs official happened to pick up a lady's Monopoly game, still apparently factory sealed, and discovered that it weighed about twenty pounds. They found two hundred and fifty thousand dollars inside. But the bigger the operation, the harder it is to smuggle."

"I see. So what's their alternative?"

"The launderer, if he's a major leaguer, probably has bank connections. He deposits his client's money in an American bank and has it wired out of the country."

"Switzerland?"

"Switzerland's a possibility, but nowadays there are at least twenty-five other countries with very strict bank secrecy laws. The Bahamas, Panama, and the Cayman Islands are popular because of the Florida drug trade. So the criminal establishes a phony corporation, has his money wired to, let's say, the Cayman Islands, then gets it back through a loan from his bogus company."

"What does the launderer get?"

"Oh, it varies, depending on experience and clout. Any-

where from one to three percent of the cash handled, usually."

"Doesn't a bank have to report so large a deposit?"

"The law says that we have to report currency transactions up to ten thousand dollars. Unfortunately, there are bank officers who can be given financial incentives to look the other way."

"What about the transfer out of the country?"

Mr. Arthur reached for his teacup. Holding the delicate china cup between the thick fingers of his big hand, he took a surprisingly dainty sip. "The transfer doesn't have to be reported. And, to give you an idea of the extent of all this, there are more than thirteen thousand individual companies in the Cayman Islands alone. Most of them exist only on paper in a lawyer's office. Now that's just about one corporation for every citizen there."

"Would this sort of thing happen in Saratoga?"

Mr. Arthur smiled and took another sip of tea. "It happens wherever there is a lot of money floating about, and if that doesn't describe Saratoga in August, I don't know what does. Gambling, drugs, prostitution, it's all here, lurking in the shadows of our lovely elms."

"Where would they bank it up here? Albany?"

"Perhaps; I hope not. It's far

more likely they'd have couriersto run it down to New York. Since they're only here for the month, I imagine they'd keep working through their bank contacts there. Naturally I can't imagine any of my colleagues cooperating."

"Do they ever get caught?"

"Rarely. It takes so much time and money to put together a case that will stick that only the stupid and unlucky ones get nabbed."

Mrs. Woodward shifted her position and coughed delicately, a signal that she had been left out of their conversation long enough.

"I'm sorry, Agnes dear," said Mr. Arthur, replacing his empty cup on the table. "Now, what was it you were saying earlier about next year's Lake George Opera Festival?"

Laura made the call around nine that night, from the office to the Holiday Inn. She asked to be connected with Mr. Sullivan's room. After a brief delay, the phone was picked up.

"Hullo?" growled a deep voice.

"Mr. Sullivan?"

"Just a sec."

Laura heard the receiver slam against a table and the sound of low voices; then another man came on the line.

"Yeah? What've you got?"

"Mr. Sullivan?"

"Yeah, yeah."

Laura glanced at a few things written on the notepad in front of her. "Mr. Sullivan, I have some information that might interest you."

"Who is this?"

"That isn't important. I know you are a professional money launderer, Mr. Sullivan, and that Timmy Baker was one of your couriers. You've been sending him to New York every Tuesday this month, haven't you?"

"You're nuts, honey."

"I also know that he stole some of that money from you and you killed him trying to get it back."

"I'm hanging up, lady."

"You can't afford to," said Laura, talking faster, knowing that Sullivan wouldn't listen much longer. "I can take this to the police tomorrow, or we can talk about it tonight. I know you were at Baker's house yesterday and found nothing. I also know you were at the scene of his accident. If you'll meet me in fifteen minutes down in the lounge, we can discuss the possibilities. Carry a sweater over your left arm and I'll contact you. And leave your goon squad behind, please."

The dial tone came on. The conversation was over.

Henri sat in the lounge for an hour, patiently nursing one beer.

Every time someone appeared at the entrance, he checked for a sweater. None showed up, possibly because the evening was carrying on with the day's intense heat.

He had let Laura make the contact from the house, just in case Sullivan decided to bring some muscular insurance to the meeting in the form of his burly associate. If that happened, Henri would change his plans. Sullivan would be looking for a woman, which would provide Henri with a margin of escape.

Although the lounge remained crowded the whole time he was there, the faces around him changed constantly. Most of the people stopped in only for a cocktail before dinner or a cordial afterward, and then were gone.

"Ready for another?" asked the bartender for the third time. There was barely a swallow left in the glass.

"No, thanks," Henri replied, sliding off the chair and heading toward the door through a dense maze of people, tables, and chairs. He walked down a carpeted corridor to the main desk, trying to decide if he should contact Sullivan himself.

"May I help you, sir?" asked the same girl he had talked with the night before. She didn't remember him.

"Yeah. Would you call Ar-

nold Sullivan's room for me, please. I don't know the room number."

"Sullivan?" Her expression indicated that the name rang a bell. "I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Sullivan checked out shortly after nine."

"Damn! Excuse me," Henri said in the same breath.

He rushed out the door and got into his car. Letting his temper get the better of him, he squealed the tires leaving the parking lot, cut in front of an approaching car on Broadway, and sped away. Two traffic lights made him slow down and had an equally soothing effect on his mood. By the time he pulled into his driveway, he was thinking almost rationally again; thinking hard about dead ends and chasing wild geese.

Laura was in the entertainment room, watching a video cassette of *Murder on the Orient Express*. Hercule Poirot seemed about ready to unmask the killers. Henri wished he could siphon off some of Poirot's confidence.

She looked up when he entered. "What happened?" she asked, reaching for the remote control and switching off the television.

"Don't ask. Nothing, that's what happened. Not a damned thing. I waited like a shmuck for over an hour. Sullivan checked out right after you

called." He dropped wearily onto the arm of a chair.

"Where did we go wrong?" she asked, coming over and stroking his hair with her hand.

Henri shrugged. "I just don't get it, Laura. I mean, even if we did trump up our threat to Sullivan a little, he couldn't have doubted the facts. He had to be wondering how we could have known he was at both the accident and Baker's house. And he has to believe we've got enough evidence, or a witness. How could he just leave like that? Doesn't he know the cops would trace his license number if we turned it in and nail him on a murder rap? Money laundering is one thing, but like your banker friend said, tough to prove. Murder, on the other hand . . . Even if our evidence is hearsay, there's no way he could know that for sure. He can't assume there were no witnesses to his running Baker off the road if somebody calls him up and talks about it."

Laura sat on the other arm of the chair. "Unless . . . unless he thought we were bluffing about the murder and just trying to blackmail him out of some money. Anonymity is more important to someone like that than anything else."

Henri leaned forward, hands on his knees, while Laura told him about Sullivan's strange, puzzled reaction to her phone

call, which she had earlier written off as good acting.

"You know, there might be another 'unless' in all this," said Henri. " 'Unless' Sullivan knew absolutely that we were bluffing about the murder and left town to protect his business interests from a shakedown of some kind. There's a lot of money in this town, but he had far too much to lose elsewhere if . . . I'm going to call Mac again."

McKerney answered his phone on the first ring.

"Mac? It's Henri Cavanaugh. Feel like opening up a murder investigation in your spare time?"

The detective sighed his "Here we go again" sigh. "The Baker accident?"

"You've got it half right. His name was Baker."

Henri told him what they had discovered thus far. McKerney listened without comment until Henri had brought him up to the stone wall they had banged their heads against tonight.

"Might just have something there," McKerney conceded, his tone of voice betraying his attempt to be noncommittal on the subject.

"It is there, Mac. We're sure of it. Listen, do us a favor, will you? Get the name and address of that kid who was a witness at the scene of the accident. I don't think he told your boys

everything he knew. It's just a hunch, but I don't know where else to look. If you get inspired, you might look him up early tomorrow morning and lean on him a little. See what turns up."

"Anything else, General Cavanaugh?"

"Yeah. One more thing. Can you get a warrant to search the house where Baker stayed?"

"Maybe. Take some time."

"That's my man. Say we meet you there around noon tomorrow. And call me after you talk with that kid, okay?"

"Yessir," McKerney said just before hanging up.

Henri contacted Ice early the following morning and asked to have another look at Baker's room. The young man said he'd call in sick if the price was right.

Laura drove them out to the house at eleven thirty. When they arrived, there was a note pinned to the door saying that Ice was in the shower and they should just walk in.

The living room looked, if that were possible, worse than it had before. The beer can collection seemed to be breeding. Two liquor bottles had fallen off the TV. Broken glass and a dark, broad stain were embedded in the carpet.

They heard the shower running. It stopped soon after they came in, and Ice entered the liv-

ing room. His hair was dripping wet. He had thrown on a white sleeveless T-shirt and gray sweatpants, both of which had already soaked through. A bath towel was draped around his neck. He took a seat on a pile of clothes in one of the armchairs and again pointed to the disheveled sofa for the Cava-naughs.

They declined his offer. Henri moved a little closer to Ice while Laura casually wandered around the room in the background. The kid watched her for a second, then concentrated on Henri. Nobody spoke until Ice broke the tense silence.

"You called me, remember? What's up?"

Henri smiled. "I thought you'd like to know that those two guys who were here the other day left town last night in a hurry."

"Yeah? So?"

"So they won't be coming back with a lot of tough questions for you."

"You come over to tell me that?"

Ice had received his nickname for more than chewing cubes, thought Henri. His eyes were calm and cold; his voice unwavering.

"No, we came to tell you that and to ask one last question . . ."

Henri let the silence between them grow. He walked over to the television and turned a few

of the liquor bottles so that their labels were facing forward. Laura had circled the room and was standing near the front door. Again Ice glanced back and forth between them, a look of mild discomfort spreading over his face. Henri approached the kid's chair, rested a hand on each side, leaned over, and stared hard into his eyes.

"Where's the money?"

"What?"

"The money, Ice. The money Timmy Baker was siphoning off a little at a time from his deliveries to New York for Sullivan. The money you ran him off the road for."

"Get outta here, man. You don't know what you're talking about."

"No? That's not what your good buddy Ed Sanders tells me. He says you were the one who forced Baker into that tree. He says all he did was stay behind at the scene of the accident to feed the cops that story about Sullivan and his gold Caddy leaving the scene."

"You're crazy," Ice muttered, but his tone was less certain.

"Henri," Laura interrupted. He turned around and noticed her looking up at the ceiling. Following her gaze, he saw what had attracted her attention. He had noticed it the first time he was here, but only now was a connection made. There were

dark smudges on three of the otherwise clean ceiling tiles.

Ice saw what they were staring at, too. "Look, either you two get the hell out of here right now or I'm calling the cops. You're trespassing."

"That's a damn good idea, Ice," said Henri. He looked toward Laura, who went over to a window near the front door and parted the curtain. She waved to someone outside, then nodded to Henri. "Looks like we've saved you the trouble, Ice. Seems the cavalry's just arrived."

A moment later the door opened and McKerney entered.

"You got a warrant?" Ice demanded, his last-ditch attempt to get them out of his house. Mac grinned as he produced one from his inside coat pocket. Ice wilted in the chair.>

**I**n the kitchen the following day, Laura was reading a newspaper account of the arrest. Nearly ten thousand dollars had been found in the dropped ceiling. Some of Baker's clothes and jewelry were discovered mixed in with Ice's stuff.

Once again Detective McKerney had cracked a tough case, this time when nobody even knew there was a case to crack. In an interview, he modestly stated that much of his information had come from an anonymous tip.

Laura smiled as Mac and Henri entered. The cop poured coffee for them because Henri was absorbed in his *Larousse Gastronomique* again. There would be a celebratory dinner tonight, whether they wanted one or not.

"God, listen to this," said Henri, wincing as he read. "It's a recipe for Tête d'Agneau à L'Écossaise."

Mac laughed. "Sounds promising, Henri. Better than your accent, I hope."

"Don't speak too soon. Here's the recipe. 'Singe and carefully clean a lamb's head. Cut in two, lengthwise. Leave to soak thoroughly in cold water. Remove the brains, then . . .'"

"Henri, please!" cried Laura. "Mac, change the subject, quickly."

Mac sat down at the table in the alcove. Laura folded her newspaper and laid it aside.

"Another brilliant success story, eh, Mac?" she said.

"Nothing really, all in a day's work. You should have seen those two punks down at the station, doing their best to lay the whole rap on each other. It turns out that Ice had an alibi, though. He was at some girl's house ordering pizza to go. It's all on record. But we'll get him as an accessory."

Henri put a finger between the pages to mark his place and shut the book for a moment.



"Ice was the idea man, all right. He must have picked up on Baker's little scheme at some point. Maybe the money was being kept in the house and he found it snooping around on one of his 'sick' days. He wouldn't have had the guts to cross somebody like Baker unless he could be sure there'd be no chance for him to retaliate. He had his buddy Sanders move out, shifted Baker into his room, and it was all set. Well planned, too. He found out about the courier runs for Sullivan and used them to advantage, pinning the blame on Sullivan so he wouldn't stay around to get nosy about the missing cash."

"That's about right," said Mac. "Neither one of them had the brains to call a lawyer. They couldn't shut up long enough. We had full statements almost immediately. One thing still bugs me, though. How in hell could they have known you'd just happen to come along that road at the right moment the night of the accident?"

"They didn't. I'm sure their original plan was to let you guys do the dirty work. That kid Sanders was probably going to feed the cops the line about seeing Sullivan's car at the scene. Ice would follow it up with a call that they'd been at the house the next day. Maybe he'd give them a license number. The accident would become

suspicious. When I came along, they improvised on the script. I foolishly told Sanders I was a PI and a friend of Baker. He must have felt more comfortable not having to deal with the cops but still having someone to lean on Sullivan."

Laura put her coffee mug down and picked up the paper. "Sanders called our house the next morning and Ice stayed home from the track, expecting us to arrive."

"If Baker was running all these schemes like you say, Henri, why did he share a house with those guys? He had enough money to live alone."

"Wouldn't you get a little suspicious of a hotwalker who could afford a place of his own? It was just a cover."

"The thing that figured to work best for Ice was the sort of money they were stealing," said Laura. "Sullivan wasn't going to report it stolen. And when his cover was blown by us, he didn't intend to risk a multimillion dollar business for anything. He simply disappeared. Sullivan dealt in high volume cash flow. He probably had a dozen couriers, or more. Baker was smart enough to take advantage of that by keeping his larceny minimal over an extended period of time. He was able to build a substantial bankroll without attracting undue attention. Ice was the first

to figure this out, but he still wanted Sullivan out of the way quickly, just in case.

"It's likely," she went on, "that if Baker was doing his embezzling properly, Sullivan hadn't even discovered it yet. But as long as Sullivan remained in Saratoga, there was a chance he'd trace the accident and money back to Baker's house, and there could be some nasty consequences."

Henri sipped his coffee and opened his book again. "When the other guys had left for work the day after the accident, Ie stripped Baker's room, slashed the mattress, destroyed all the belongings he didn't want, and stuffed the cash into that space above the dropped ceiling. He could afford to wait out the month, knowing Sullivan would have his own problems and nobody would have any reason to suspect an innocent young stablehand. He even pretended to be impressed with my twenty dollar information buys, knowing that ten grand was waiting for him right over our heads."

"The clincher came when we tried to arrange a meeting with Sullivan to discuss the accident," said Laura. "I couldn't help feeling as I spoke with him on the phone that he honestly had no idea of what I was talk-

ing about. Of course, my mentioning that we knew he was a professional launderer must have worried him, but as for murder..."

Mac nodded. "He probably thought it was just some kind of amateur blackmail scheme; not serious enough to deal with, but also not worth risking exposure by ignoring."

"And now to more important matters," said Henri, turning a few pages of the book. "How about Tête de Veau à La Toulousaine? Let's see, 'Cut the cooked head into square pieces. Put in a dish with pieces of tongue and brains. Add..."

"That's it," Mac interrupted. "I'm taking you both out to dinner on my meager public servant's earnings."

"Rescued at last," sighed Laura, getting up from her chair.

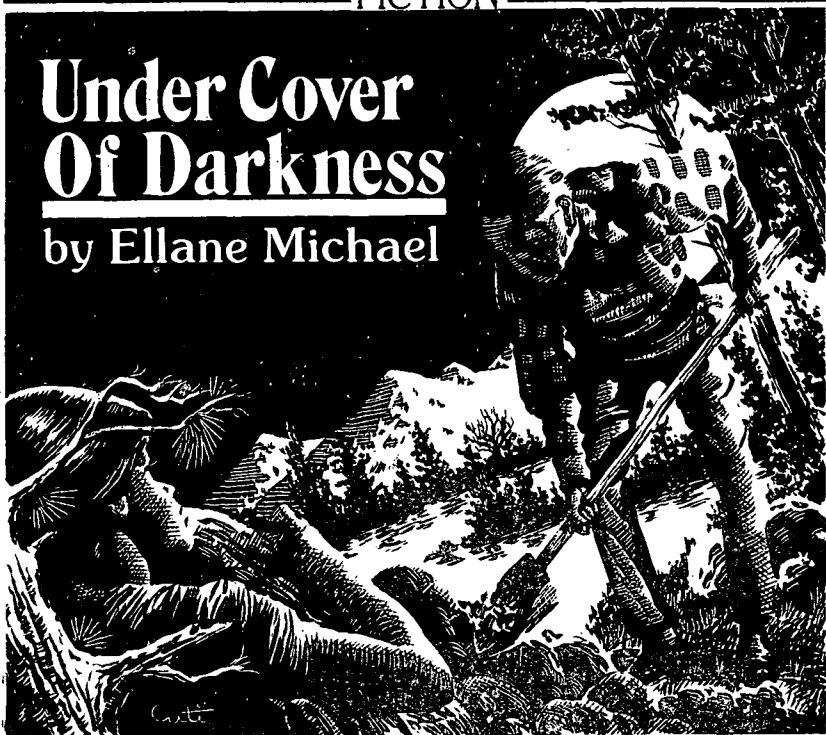
"But..." Henri began to protest as Mac and Laura linked arms and hurried from the kitchen. "But don't you want at least to see the picture?"

He grinned as disgusted groans echoed from the hallway.

"Some people have no respect for the finer things in life," he yelled as he got up to join them. "I'll bet Julia Child doesn't get treated like this."

# Under Cover Of Darkness

by Ellane Michael



“W hatcha doin’, mister?”

Jake froze, the arch of his boot suspended above the spade. Slowly he brought his foot down and pushed the shovel into the deepening hole.

“Isn’t it kinda late for a little fellow like you to be out?” Jake scanned the trees at the edge of the clearing. All the houses in the subdivision beyond were dark, as they should be at three o’clock in the morning.

“I’m camping,” the child declared. “My dad pitched a tent in our back yard and I’m staying in it all night.”

“By yourself?” Jake queried. He sure didn’t want the kid’s father looming up in the moonlight.

“Yep. All by myself. I’m eight, you know.”

“Eight, huh?” Jake resumed digging. “Didn’t your folks warn you that it could be dangerous to wander around alone at night?”

“Sure.”

But it apparently didn’t faze this kid. Murder and kidnapping

and child-molesting were themes for TV shows, not real life. Jake swore under his breath. No wonder there was so much depravity in the world. People went around asking for trouble. Jake studied the silent boy, who was staring into the black void, spellbound.

"Ever been to China?" Jake asked, remembering his childhood.

"Nope."

"Me neither." Jake continued scooping out mounds of dirt. "Always wanted to go to someplace exotic. Can't afford it, though, so I decided to dig my own passage."

"That's silly. If I really believed you, I'd think you were awfully dumb." A disgusted look crossed the young features. "Don'tcha know that the middle of the earth is probably metal, or something real hot like lava?"

"How'd you get so smart, kid?"

"I'm in the third grade. We have big pictures of the earth in our class and we even read a book all about rocks and volcanoes and earthquakes. I have my own library card!"

"That's nice. Now don't you think it's time you climbed into your sleeping bag so you won't fall asleep in school tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow's Saturday."

"Little kids need lots of sleep."

"I'm not tired. Want me to dig for a while?"

"No!"

Jake hadn't meant for that to come out so harshly. He liked kids. He really did. Wasn't it for their sakes that he came out to this power line once every month, neatly lifted out a patch of sod, and dug a hole just to the bottom of the water penetration level? The future, that's all he was thinking of. . . .

"Are you breaking the law?" the boy asked, not fearfully, just curious.

"Me?" Jake managed to chuckle. "Is it against the law to dig for buried treasure?" That ought to get the kid.

"This land belongs to the power company. My dad said so. They keep it all mowed, but we can play in it. Mom said it was just like owning a bigger lot because there'll never be any houses behind ours."

"That's swell, kid."

"So, if you find treasure, it won't belong to you, will it?"

"Finders keepers. You won't tell on me, will you, kid?" Jake furrowed his brow and scowled in what he hoped was a very intimidating way.

"Why shouldn't I?"

Since when were eight-year-olds so totally fearless? Try another tactic. . . .

"I need this money." Jake leaned wearily against his shovel. "I've got four kids of my own to feed." He wasn't even married, but the kid didn't have to know that. And money wasn't a problem for Jake, either. He was doing this for the principle of the thing, that's all.

"Name 'em."

"What?"

"Name your kids."

"Well, let's see . . ." Was the boy actually trying to trap him? "There's Melissa, she's twelve, and Johnny is nine . . ."

"What grade is he in?"

"Uh, third."

"Same as me. Did he flunk?"

"No. No. He was just sick a lot last year."

Jake tromped the shovel hard. Finish this task and get back to the apartment, that warren of six hundred souls right in the heart of the city. Six hundred people breathing the air, eating the food, using up coal and oil and gas, and making waste. Tons and tons of waste every year.

"Who else?"

"Who else what?" Jake retorted. Thank goodness the hole was almost deep enough. Now to get rid of the boy.

"What're your other kids' names?"

"Susie and Mary. Now run along home before I report you to your parents."

"You wouldn't do that."

"Oh, wanta bet?"

"Yeah."

Jake scowled for real.

"And what makes you think that?" he demanded.

"Because of whatever you've got in that plastic bag." The boy nodded toward the dark bulk behind Jake.

"It's . . . it's . . . look, kid, the truth is, I'm burying treasure, not digging it up."

"Oh?" How skeptical can a child get?

"Yep." Jake warmed to his tale. "You see, I inherited a . . . a million bucks from . . . from my Great-uncle Joe, but I don't want my wife to know it. Why, my Gretchen would just run right out and spend . . ."

"How come you don't wear a wedding ring?"

"What are you, a detective or something?"

"I watch the Bloodhound Gang on TV," the boy said by way of explanation.

"Good for you. Now run along or that bloodhound'll have to come looking for you by morning."

"It's not a dog. It's kids. Would you really hurt me?"

Jake lifted the bag, then paused. He had to dump the contents. The stuff had to rot. All his good intentions would be for nothing if the bag stayed tied up, but he sure didn't want the boy watching. Damn the kid, anyway.

"Would you hurt me, mister?" he repeated.

"Maybe." Jake looked as mean as he could, which was getting easier by the minute. He should have been back on his waterbed by now, lulled to sleep by the warmth and motion instead of standing in a field arguing with this boy.

"Whew!" the child wrinkled his nose. "That sure stinks. It can't be money." He reached out and touched the bag. It was rather squishy. Money wasn't squishy.

"It's Johnny," whispered Jake. "He wasn't a good son. He didn't obey me. He was bad, very bad." The boy started backing away. "I had to punish him. I had to set an example for my other kids so they'd behave." Jake hefted the bag. "Too bad about Johnny, though . . ."

Suddenly the boy broke into a run. In an instant he had disappeared into the shadow of the trees. Doubtless he'd tell his father. Jake emptied the contents of his sack and began scraping dirt into the hole. Pity. This had been such a good place. Jake looked up at the power lines striping the starry night. The land wasn't being used. And it wasn't as though he was burying cans or glass or newspapers or plastic. Heck no, he recycled all those things. But in the city you had to bag up your garbage and leave it outside the apartment door every Friday. Every Friday, hundreds and hundreds of plastic bags, last-forever plastic bags, lining the halls. It sickened Jake.

Shouldering his spade, he started toward his car. He'd just have to find another place to bury his garbage, that's all there was to it. He couldn't take a chance on coming back here and being caught. Didn't want to be fined. Sad, this had been such a perfect place, for more than a year, the perfect burial site. Still, Jake couldn't help grinning at the image of a group of policemen gathered around his latest hole, peering anxiously into the depths for blood or bone or flesh. Might be some chicken bones in there, officers.

# UNSOLVED

by D. G. Wells

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.

The results were about to be announced in the annual Ruritanian song festival, but there was apparently some delay. Gradually the word was passed round that one of the four finalists, instead of giving three marks to the other finalist he rated highest, and two marks for the next best finalist and one mark for the third best (naturally no finalist was asked to rate his own song), had reversed the marks given, hoping to favor his own chances. He had given one mark to his best choice, two marks to his middle choice, and three marks to the finalist he actually thought worst.

The commotion was of course tremendous and it only increased when it was revealed that two of the other finalists had taken exactly the same dishonest step in the hope, so they thought, of improving their chances.

Before these revelations were made, all four finalists had been tied on six points. When the judges eventually reversed the marking orders of the three dishonest finalists, in what place did the honest singer find himself?

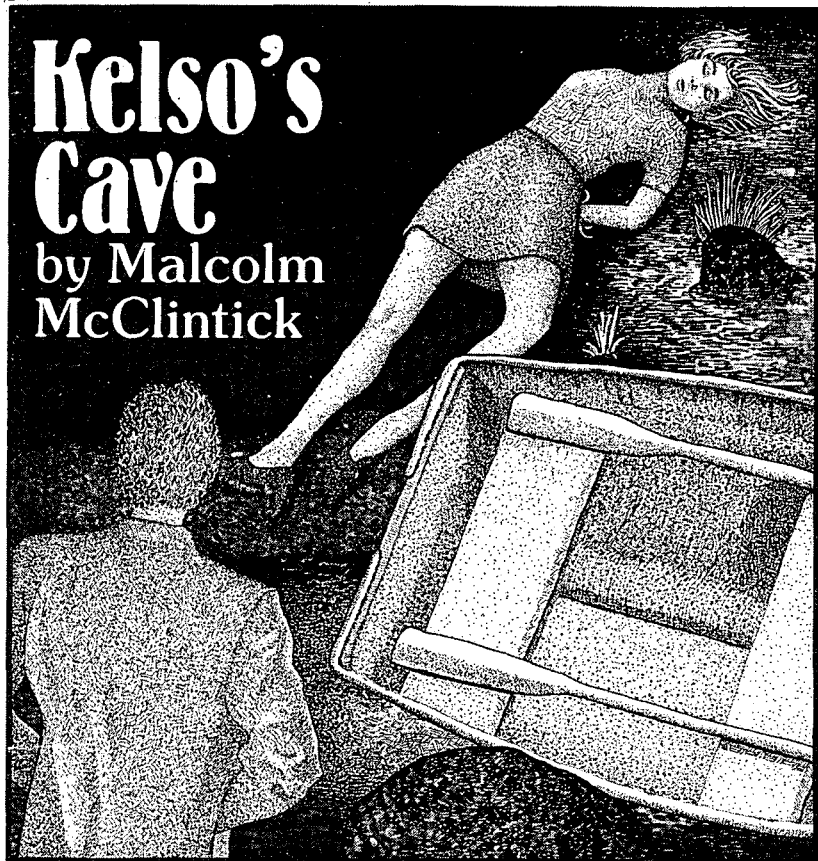
See page 113 for the solution to the November puzzle.

*"Behind the Scenes," taken from Recreations in Logic by D. G. Wells. Copyright © 1979 by D. G. Wells. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.*



# Kelso's Cave

by Malcolm  
McClintick



**D**etective Sergeant Meyer answered the phone in the Detective Section at five minutes till five, said a few brief words, then turned to scowl across the big rectangular room at Kelso, who sat at his desk toying with his pipe. He'd bought a pipe tool recently on the theory that keeping the bowl clean might enhance his chances of keeping

the pipe lit. As it went out again for the fourth or fifth time, he heard Meyer call out:

"Some broad wants to speak to you, Kelso. Sounds like an emergency."

Several others in the room glanced Kelso's way; he felt his face go slightly warm with embarrassment. Thinking that it must be Susan Overstreet, he sighed and lifted the receiver of

*Illustration by Kurt Wallace*

his phone. "Sergeant Kelso."

A young woman's voice exploded rapidly in his ear, almost hysterically:

"George. Thank God. You probably don't know me, I mean we've never actually met. But I'm a friend of Susan's. Marie, my name's Marie. Can you get over to my house as soon as possible? You've got to hurry, or—"

"Just a minute," Kelso said, frowning. He got out his notebook and ballpoint. "What did you say your name was?"

"Marie. If you don't hurry, he'll kill me. For God's sake, can't you hurry? Listen, the address is—"

Kelso scribbled the words. She continued to babble on.

"He's threatened to kill me before, but this time he really means it. I thought since you know me, because you know Susan I mean, maybe you'd hurry. Do you understand? I can't stay on the line."

"Miss? I didn't get your last name. Miss?"

But there was a sudden click, then the dial tone buzzed in his ear. Kelso hung up and saw several of his cohorts smirking in his general direction. He stood and reached for his suit coat, the battered tan corduroy, and stuck his pipe and the new pipe tool into a pocket.

"Cutting out so fast, Kelso?" asked Meyer sarcastically.

"It's an emergency," he said.

On the way out he found Stephaniak, the grizzled uniformed sergeant he enjoyed working with, and they headed for a police cruiser.

"You probably got one of them hysterical females on your hands," Stephaniak said when Kelso had filled him in with the slight bit of information he had. "Probably got some kind of boyfriend trouble. Probably get there and find them in each other's arms, all smiles and sweetness. Make the whole trip for nothing."

Kelso was hungry. It was nearly the end of the day shift and he'd missed lunch because of several hours spent looking for an escaped mental patient. The weather was too hot for late October, in his opinion, and he wasn't in the mood to waste his off-duty hours playing games with a couple who were having a minor spat, even if she did happen to be a friend of Susan's. But he managed a slight smile.

"May as well have a look," he told the sergeant. "You never know."

Stephaniak muttered something inaudible, and drove fast into rush-hour traffic.

**I**t was five twenty when they arrived at the address: a small house, white frame, set well back under towering trees from which yellow and

red leaves fluttered groundward in the late October breeze. It was the only house on a dead-end street. Stephaniak parked at the curb, and he and Kelso trudged through a deep accumulation of dead leaves to the house's tiny porch. The front door stood open. Kelso knocked at the screen door.

"I don't think anybody's home," Stephaniak said. "I told you it'd be a false alarm."

"It doesn't feel right to me," Kelso said, knocking again. Nothing happened. "Let's have a look inside."

"Breaking and entering, Kelso?"

"Report of a person in danger. House is open. Suspicious circumstances." Kelso shrugged. "We've got probable cause to enter."

Stephaniak grunted.

Inside the house was a small, sparsely furnished living room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen, all empty. One bedroom contained nothing but a small desk piled with notebooks and paper. The other had a chest, its drawers stuffed with a woman's clothing, and a closet full of dresses, blouses, skirts, and shoes. A cup of coffee on the kitchen table still felt warm as Kelso held his hand over it, and a cigarette that had burned down to its filter in an ashtray smelled freshly smoked. On one counter a percolator gurgled.

The single window was wide open, its chintz curtains billowing into the room over a sink, providing a view of a back yard surrounded by tall trees.

"Somebody's been in here recently," Kelso said, "drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette. I'd kill for a cigarette."

"I thought you gave 'em up."

"I did. That's what my pipe's for. But I still miss them."

"Maybe this broad's playing a joke on you," Stephaniak said dourly.

Kelso stepped over to a wall phone, used a handkerchief to lift its receiver, got a dial tone, replaced it. "Let's try outside," he said, and went through the back door. Stephaniak followed.

The yard stretched back towards a thick wood. There were a few areas like this remaining in the city—small streets whose lots backed on woods or, in some cases, swamps, waiting for a developer to snap them up and build on them. Sometimes the owners refused to sell. Kelso thought he might sell, if he owned such property; he'd use the money to have his VW repaired and to buy extra dinners and movies for Susan Overstreet.

He strolled towards the woods, listening to a jay screech. The slanting rays of the setting sun glared redly into his eyes, making him squint. It was pleasant

out here. Still, there was a nasty feel about it all. The girl had sounded terrified of something.

A scrap of yellow caught his eye. A piece of material was caught on a bush and was blowing in the wind. Silky, torn along one side. Feminine. About the size of a large handkerchief, apparently part of a shirt or blouse.

"What's this?" Stephaniak had come forward and was pointing.

On the ground next to the bush gaped a large hole, possibly three feet across, partially concealed by the bush and thick weeds. Kelso saw that a rope had been tied around a nearby tree trunk; it trailed down inside the hole.

"Looks like the opening of some sort of shaft," Kelso said. "Have you got your flashlight?"

"Right here."

"Maybe it's an old well."

"I don't think it's a well," Stephaniak said, aiming his light into the hole. The dirt sides seemed to drop straight down. He knelt down and peered closer. "It's one of them damn caves. This area's full of 'em. See—somebody's been using this rope to crawl in and out with." He grunted, then added; "I can see the bottom. Phew, it's muddy."

"I didn't know there were caves right here in the city."

Kelso said, already feeling a little queasy. Once, as a small boy, he'd become lost inside a cave he'd been exploring against the advice of his parents. He'd spent terrified hours in cramped tunnels before his father and some neighbors had found him and gotten him out. There had been no need for punishment—he'd had nightmares for a month. He had avoided caves ever since. He stepped back from the hole.

"Lots of caves around here," said Stephaniak. "Some of 'em big, some no bigger than your living room. Few of 'em got underground streams or lakes in 'em. Some biologists from the university even found blind fish in some."

"I don't understand why anybody'd want to go down a hole like that."

"Maybe your hysterical female friend went down there."

They went back through the house, which was still empty, and across the front yard to the cruiser. Kelso used the radio to call headquarters.

"Leill here."

"This is George Kelso, sir."

The lieutenant's reply was an amplified sigh.

Kelso gave him the facts of the situation. "Could you send someone over here to check out the cave, sir?"

Leill sighed again. Kelso could almost feel the lieutenant's cold

grey eyes boring into him. "No, Kelso, I couldn't. This is the night shift. I'm short of personnel already. I can't take what men I've got off their duty assignments and have them traipsing all over town just to go cave exploring because some stupid girlfriend of yours got hysterical over her boyfriend."

"She's not my girlfriend, sir. She's the friend of a friend. And I think something's happened to her. Sergeant Stephaniak and I found part of her blouse caught on a bush just by the cave entrance."

"How do you know it belongs to her?"

"I don't see who else it could belong to. At any rate, someone should investigate the cave. The woman's obviously disappeared." It was easier for Kelso to tell Leill what he thought when they were separated by large physical distances.

Leill's sigh this time was almost seismic. It was followed by a long silence. Finally he said: "Kelso, I'm assigning a man to check out the cave."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. We'll wait right here."

"You won't have to wait, Kelso. I'm assigning you."

"Me?" Kelso's stomach jumped. He felt his pulse accelerate. "But I—"

"Check out the cave, Kelso, and report back. That's an order."

"Sir—"

But Leill had hung up.

"You sure you don't want me to go?" asked Stephaniak.

They stood in the lengthening shadows, next to the hole. Kelso would have liked nothing better than for Stephaniak to go. But the uniformed sergeant was old, almost sixty, and seemed even older than that. Kelso was only thirty-six. He was a few pounds overweight, but in better shape than Stephaniak.

"I'll go," Kelso told him. "Just be ready to help me out."

Reluctantly, Kelso took the sergeant's flashlight, sat down on the ground with his legs dangling into the opening, grasped the rope tightly, and began sliding into the hole. His heart was a sledgehammer in his chest. I'll never make it, he thought. I'll die.

The entrance was just wide enough for him to press his arms and legs against the slippery dirt sides and lower himself little by little into darkness. He halted once, took a deep breath, and kept going. He seemed to move downward forever, but when finally his feet touched a solid surface he looked up to see the faint circle of light only about five feet above his head. Still, it gave him the feeling of having descended into a pit from which there was no re-

turn. Holding tightly to the rope for a moment, he switched on the flashlight.

"You okay, Kelso?" Stephan-iak shouted from the surface.

"Okay," Kelso called back, the word almost sticking in his throat.

The beam of light revealed a tan clay surface under his feet, wet rocky walls on either side, a dark brown ceiling overhead. The ground sloped away from him into darkness. Apparently he stood at the upper end of a large cavern which fell away towards the far end. Kelso felt that he would suffocate; the air in the cave was cold and smelled of earth. He thought this must be what it would feel like to be buried alive. He had to force himself to step forward.

Slipping occasionally, gritting his teeth, Kelso made his way down the slope, thankful that at least he was wearing his old corduroys and his crepe-soled shoes. He cursed Leill silently; the man had sent him into the cave for pure spite, he was certain of it. Well, Leill could buy him a new corduroy suit, or at least pay to have it cleaned. He heard water dripping, and his light revealed the edge of a dark lake or pond directly ahead, where the ground leveled out.

The surface of the lake was black and smooth. A few yards off to his right, a wooden boat

sat in the water, just at the edge. He made his way over. The anchor lay on the wet clay to keep the boat from drifting away. Kelso peered into the boat. It was empty, but something floated alongside it. He shone the light on it. A pale face seemed to stare up at him from just beneath the gloomy surface.

Kelso bent down, reached into the water, feeling it icy cold on his hands and arms, and pulled at the body till he had it out. It was a young woman with long, dark hair, her eyes closed. There were a few cuts on her face and arms. She wore a short-sleeved blouse of the same silky yellow material that he had seen clinging to the bush outside the cave entrance. Her hands had been tied behind her back with a piece of rope.

Instinctively, Kelso checked his watch: five thirty-five. Then he laid her out on the wet clay surface and administered mouth-to-mouth resuscitation for a long time, but there was never any respiration and never any pulse.

**T**he crime scene investigators had been summoned and were going over the house, the yard, and the cave, using big searchlights to penetrate the darkness that had fallen. Kelso sat in the kitchen, huddled in a

blanket, sipping fresh coffee from the percolator. He had only a vague memory of getting out of the cave—gripping the rope with slippery, dirty fingers; trying for a foothold in the wet dirt, panting and grunting as he tried to work his portly body up the shaft to the surface, swearing to go on yet another diet and swearing never to go into the cave again.

Stephaniak came in and sat down opposite him at the kitchen table. "We've got a little information," he said. "Her purse was in the bedroom closet. She's Sylvia Marie Cauldwell. No police record—they ran the license on her car, a blue Rabbit parked on the street. Twenty-three. University I.D. card. Bankbook shows a couple of hundred in checking, about three thousand in savings. Piece of paper in her purse with your name and the Detective Section number on it."

Suddenly Kelso's face burned and he felt acutely uncomfortable. Susan Overstreet had been talking to him recently about a girl she'd met in a night class at the university, a girl named Marie. Kelso never paid much attention to stories about Susan's classmates who had troubles with their professors or their boyfriends—he had other problems. This Marie had a problem, something about her ex-husband. Would Susan have

given her Kelso's name and the Detective Section number, a number the general public didn't have, without telling him? Or maybe she had told him.

"I've got to make a call," he said, and went over to the wall phone. A familiar voice answered. "Susan?"

"George! Where are you? We were supposed to have supper—"

"I know, I know." He sighed. "Do you know Marie Cauldwell?"

"Of course. I've been telling you about her. Do you—"

"Is her first name Sylvia?"

"Yes, it is, but she likes to be called by her middle name, Marie. George, where are you?"

"Listen, Susan, does she have an ex-husband?"

"I told you the other night. Her ex-husband Jack is back in town from the Marines, and he wants her house. When they got married last year and he moved in with her, she signed over half interest in the house to him, or something like that. But when she divorced him, she got it back. And now he's after her to let him have it again. He's a real hothead, George, that's what I was trying to tell you the other night. He's even threatened her. So I gave her your number at work. That was okay, wasn't it? Hey—has something happened?"

"I'll call you later, Susan." Kelso was embarrassed.



"No, George, don't hang up. I want to know what's going on."

"I'll call you back."

"George—"

Gently, he replaced the receiver.

Dr. Swartz from the coroner's office came in, wearing muddy blue coveralls with POLICE across the back in white. He was a small, grey, fiftyish man, peering at Kelso through metal-rimmed glasses.

"How're you doing, Kelso?"

"I've been better."

"Hmm. Well, I looked at the body. Interesting cave, do some cave exploring now and then myself. Spelunking, they call it. Anyhow, I found a nasty bump on her head. I won't know till the autopsy whether that killed her or whether she drowned. I'll have to see how much water's in her lungs, if any, and the condition of her brain."

Kelso nodded morosely. "Anything else?"

"Uh-huh. As you know, her hands were tied. My guess at the moment is that somebody tied her up, bashed in her head, and dropped her down the cave entrance. You saw the cuts on her face and arms. She rolled, but maybe not all the way to the water. Either way, the killer probably held her under for a while, thinking to drown her if

the blow to her head didn't kill her. Maybe he wanted it to look like a drowning. I'd say she got hit on the head about five P.M., give or take half an hour."

"At five P.M. she was talking to me." Kelso told Dr. Swartz about the phoné call.

"In that case, I'd say it was right after you talked to her."

Swartz left. Detective Sergeant Meyer, small and dark and surly and looking like something that might have just crawled out of the cave, came into the kitchen, gave Kelso his usual scowl, and muttered:

"Whoever killed her is long gone. By the way, they've found another car outside."

Kelso shed the blanket and went out to the side of the house. Sylvia Marie Cauldwell's blue Rabbit was parked on the street, but in a narrow drive extending far back into a clump of trees, a couple of investigators had found a second car, a blue Pinto, partly hidden from the house by foliage. Kelso put his hand on the hood; the metal was hot. He could feel heat radiating from the engine, and smell hot engine oil. There was a Marine Corps sticker on the rear bumper.

Back in the house he asked one of the cops about the car.

"We've run the license already," the cop said. "Registered to a John Murray Cauldwell, in Whitesburg."

"Anything on him?"

"A couple of convictions for assault, but he never did time."

Meyer was glaring. "Come on, Kelso, let's wrap this up. I've put out an all-points on this guy Cauldwell. He's obviously skipped. Let's get going."

"Wait a minute." Kelso was thinking about the hot coffee, the recently smoked cigarette, and the timing. He'd spoken to Marie at five P.M. At about that time, probably, her ex-husband had hit her on the head with something. He'd taken her to the cave and, hands tied, dropped her down the entrance. He'd followed, and taken her to the water's edge, beside the boat.

Kelso had arrived at the house with Stephaniak at five twenty. The house had been empty. They'd seen no one. Kelso had gone into the cave and found the body at five thirty-five, while Sergeant Stephaniak waited above. The crime scene investigators had arrived. During all that time no one had been seen leaving the cave, the house, or the surrounding area. And Cauldwell's car was parked by the house, its engine still warm.

"Come on, Kelso," said Meyer impatiently. "What are we waiting for? Mother's Day? Or do you think Cauldwell's going to come back for his car?"

"I don't think he ever left," Kelso replied.

Meyer's face went dark red. "Where is he, then? In your hip pocket?"

"No," Kelso said. "He's in the cave."

For a long time, Leill said nothing. What was *he* waiting for, Kelso wondered. Had the lieutenant gone to sleep? But finally the hard voice spoke from the telephone receiver: "All right, Kelso."

"Sir?"

"If you're convinced that Cauldwell's hiding in that cave, then why don't you think up a way to get him out of it?"

"Well—"

"Do whatever you think's necessary, Kelso." Leill sounded suddenly tired. Perhaps he was preoccupied with other matters. "Tell Meyer."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." Kelso hung up.

Sergeant Stephaniak, Detective Sergeant Meyer, and several other cops stood around the kitchen, waiting expectantly. It was six thirty. Through the kitchen window Kelso could see the glare of the lights that had been set up in the yard, and knew that a power cord had been let down into the cave to provide light there.

"Lieutenant Leill told me to think of a way to get Cauldwell out of the cave," he said, looking at Meyer.

Meyer rolled his eyes. "If you

really think he's in the cave," he said heavily, "then we should search it."

"I don't think that's the best thing," Kelso said, trying to sound firm but respectful at the same time. "Even with the light, there are apt to be a lot of tunnels and crevices where Cauldwell could hide. It might take hours."

"He's probably gone already," snapped Meyer.

Kelso shrugged. "He hasn't had a chance yet, with all the investigators down there with lights and everything. I think he meant to use that boat, and the boat's still where I found it."

"We could wait him out," a cop said. "He's got to come out sometime." He paused to glance around at his fellow officers, then added meaningfully: "That is, if he's really in there."

Ignoring this, Kelso replied: "If we sit and wait he could get out by way of some other exit we don't know about."

"So what's your brilliant idea, then?" Meyer demanded.

"I'd like everyone to leave," Kelso said. "I'd like the girl's body taken out of the cave. Try to make it look as though the investigation's finished and we're taking our equipment and going home."

"Amazing," Meyer threw up his hands. "Why didn't I think of that? We'll all just leave."

"I'll stay here," Kelso told

him quietly. "In the cave."

"You'll be by yourself in a dark cave with a killer," Sergeant Stephaniak told him. There was concern in the old man's gruff voice. "You sure you don't want some company?"

"No. I'll be okay," Kelso said. "The point is to make him think everyone's left. If I can catch him in the cave, it'll be like catching him red-handed. But the fewer the better." He forced a smile. "It's only a big hole in the ground."

"Be careful, Kelso."

Kelso gritted his teeth, grasped the rope, and eased himself down the vertical shaft into the cave. The rest of the team was getting the body wrapped and ready to be lifted out, in the glare of a spotlight. Five uniformed cops milled around the bundle that was the girl's body, then carried it up the sloping floor to the shaft and secured the rope to it.

Kelso stepped back into the darkness. He could just see over the top of a large rock.

"Haul her up!" someone shouted, and the rope went taut. They held the body, an oblong package in a sheet, and maneuvered it up the vertical hole.

"We've got her," someone called down.

"Okay, let's get the hell out of here and go home," said one of the cops.

"Where do you suppose that creep is by now?" asked someone else.

"Miles away, probably."

"Don't matter," said another. "State cops'll grab him. He won't get far."

One by one they used the rope to ascend the slippery clay walls. The spotlight was pulled up and suddenly there was no light. Kelso stood perfectly still behind his rock, about halfway down to the lake, breathing slowly, waiting.

Cauldwell had to be here in the cave. It was the only thing that made any sense. His engine-warm car was still there by the house. He'd killed the girl at five and taken her into the cave. Probably he'd barely had time to hold her head under water when he'd heard Kelso coming down the shaft. He'd left her body there by the boat, which he'd planned to use for his escape, and hidden himself. If he'd lived in this house, then probably he'd been in the cave many times and would know all its secrets. Now he'd be steeling himself to make his move. Probably he'd wait a few minutes to make certain no one was coming back, then head for the boat.

Kelso forced himself to breathe very slowly. It was deadly silent in the cave—rather, the silence accentuated what slight noise there

was: the steady plink-plink of dripping water. Every sound seemed amplified. He wondered if the killer could hear his stomach rumbling—he still hadn't eaten anything. Afraid to move, he leaned against the cold rock, straining his ears for the slightest sound, trying to ignore the nightmares that were trying to come back to him.

All around him was utter blackness, pressing in. He literally could not discern his hand in front of his face. The last time he'd experienced this kind of absolute darkness was that other time, as a child. . . .

Panic gripped him, chills ran up his back. He had to concentrate.

There . . . was that the sound of someone walking?

A scraping came from off to his right. Wood knocked against wood with a hollow sound. Kelso tensed. He'd expected the killer to use a light, but there was no light. He must have followed the water's edge in the darkness. Now came the gentle slap of oars against water.

It was time to act.

He emerged from behind the rock, switched on his flashlight, and trotted down to the lake, careful not to slip on the wet clay floor. The beam picked out a figure rowing a boat a few yards out. Kelso must have guessed right—somewhere on the other side of the lake was

a second entrance to the cave, and the killer was heading for it.

Kelso stopped and put his hands to his mouth. "Cauldwell! Police! Come back—you can't get away now!"

He saw a flash of light and something slammed into the ground just at his feet. The shot echoed around the cave like thunder. Kelso fell flat onto the ground, lying prone, and drew out his service revolver. Taking careful aim, trying to avoid hitting Cauldwell, he squeezed the trigger.

Another series of echoes rumbled around the cave walls. He fired again. More thunder, but this time he heard the loud splinter of wood and knew he'd hit the boat. He fired a third round, and more wood splintered. With his other hand he held the flashlight steady.

The boat turned slowly sideways. Its stern slipped beneath the water. A figure stood up in the bow, appeared to hesitate, then jumped over the side.

Light flickered behind Kelso. Someone half ran, half slid down the slope and stood up, panting.

"Where is he, Kelso?" gasped Detective Sergeant Meyer.

"Thanks for your concern," Kelso said. "I'm fine. Cauldwell's out there, swimming."

"Well, he won't get far. We found the other entrance, a few hundred feet into the woods.

He's trapped now, even if he makes it across."

"He's swimming towards us," Kelso observed.

A few minutes later a man with dark dripping hair was pulled out of the lake and led to the shaft. Kelso was the first one up.

Jack Cauldwell was given a blanket and read his rights while he sat at the kitchen table. He was a big man, about thirty, with a military haircut, a rugged tanned face, and a harsh mountain accent.

"I didn't care beans about that hussy," he said. "I didn't kill her for love or jealousy or none of them things. It was the blind fish."

"You killed a woman for blind fish?" Meyer sounded incredulous.

"I asked her to sign over this house to me," he said. "And she wouldn't have none of it. Most spiteful woman I ever met."

Kelso sat opposite Cauldwell and sipped coffee. "I don't understand. Did you tell her you wanted the house because there were blind fish in the underground lake?"

"You think I'm stupid?" Cauldwell sneered. "She never even knew about them fish. One thing, she was scared of caves, never went in 'em. Another thing, I didn't tell her. She wouldn't never of given up

the property if I'd told her."

"Why would she simply have given you her house?"

"Not give. Sell. I offered her money. Cash money. But she was spiteful, and wouldn't sell." He cast a sullen glare around the room. "I'd of made a lot more than I was offering to pay her, once I sold them blind fish to some research outfit."

"And so," Kelso said, "when she wouldn't sell, you decided to kill her. Why? Killing her wouldn't get you the property."

"I killed her," said Jack Cauldwell, "because of how spiteful she was, and because I figured to buy the property from whoever wound up with it." He shrugged. "That make you happy? I've confessed, now you can all go home and feed your faces while I go rot in jail." He gave a little raspy laugh and added, "I hope you don't think I'm sorry. She deserved what I gave her. I'm not a bit sorry. I'm just sorry I couldn't of gotten my hands on that cave."

Meyer shook his head in disbelief. "Blind fish," he muttered.

When Kelso went outside, Susan Overstreet's big Olds was parked at the curb and he saw her walking towards him in the dimness, the vague light from a street lamp glinting softly on her blonde

hair. It had grown cold; she wore a quilted blue jacket.

"George. I heard . . . is Marie . . . ?"

"We got here too late," Kelso said.

Susan was a tough girl. She put her arms around him and as he held her she shuddered once or twice; then stepped back and asked: "Did you get him?"

"Yeah."

"Why, George? Why did he kill her? Was it just because he wanted the house back?"

"No." He told her about the cave and its blind fish. "It was greed, the way it usually is."

Susan stared at him with her wide dark eyes. "But George, don't you know? Didn't anybody tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"Marie couldn't have sold him that property. She didn't own it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Marie owned the house, sure. But two years ago, before she and Jack were even married, she sold that whole area behind it to the university—the woods, the cave, everything. That cave belongs to the university now, and so do the blind fish."

Kelso felt stunned. "I don't get it. Why didn't Cauldwell bother to find out about that before he came tearing in here and killed her? All he had to do was ask somebody."

"Maybe he was like the fish,"

Susan said. "Just blind."

She drove him to his apartment so he could change clothes, then to one of their favorite restaurants for a late supper. When she dropped him off at his apartment again, he was tired and she said goodnight.

He felt as if he'd just lived through a long, weird nightmare. In a daze he fed his big yellow cat; he thought he could still feel the darkness of the cave enveloping him, still smell the earthy darkness.

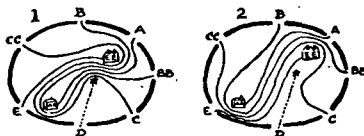
He showered, put on pajamas, and lay down in his bed, but it was too dark and quiet in the room. He shivered. It was like being in that terrible cave all over again.

Getting up, he found his sleeping bag, carried it out to his patio, and crawled inside. The cold night air smelled fresh, and the continuous rumble of traffic from a nearby freeway was comforting.

At daybreak, the pilot of a police helicopter on routine, early-morning patrol was surprised to observe what appeared to be a man lying on the patio of an apartment belonging to Sergeant George Kelso of the Detective Section. Hovering and peering through binoculars for a better look, the pilot noted that the man was indeed Kelso, that he was tucked inside a sleeping bag which was covered with frost, and that he had a smile on his face.

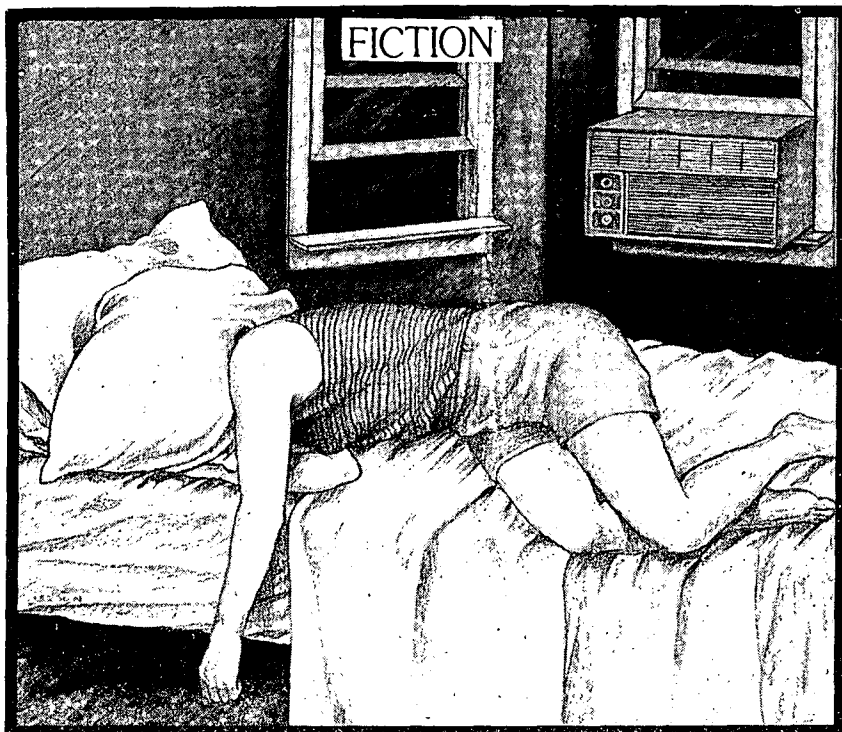
### **SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED":**

The diagrams show that there are two different ways in which the routes of the various persons involved in the Ravensdene Mystery may be traced, without any path ever crossing another. It depends whether the butler, E, went to the north or the south of the gamekeeper's cottage, and the gamekeeper, A, went to the south or north of the hall. But it will be found that the only persons



who could have approached Mr. Cyril Hastings without crossing a path were the butler, E, and the man, C. It was, however, a fact that the butler retired to bed five minutes before midnight, whereas Mr. Hastings did not leave his friend's house until midnight. Therefore the criminal must have been the man who entered at C.





# Open And Shut Case

by Sarah Gilbert

**T**here were two reasons for Harlow Fletcher's conviction of first degree murder in the death of his wife Isabel. One was the evidence of the open windows and the silenced air conditioners.

The other was the testimony of Lydia Moore, Fletcher's next door neighbor.

## SCENARIO

**SETTING WHERE MURDER OCCURRED:** The apartment farthest from the street in a rundown bungalow court in the San Fernando Valley.

*Illustration by Laurie Harden*

TIME: Midsummer, during a prolonged heat wave.

CHARACTERS: *Harlow Fletcher*, a small, slight man of fifty, a health fanatic who thinks the devil invented air conditioning. Also believes money is to be saved, not spent.

*Isabel*, Harlow's wife, the same age as her husband, a stout woman always prostrated by hot weather.

*Prosecuting Attorney*.

*Defense Attorney*.

*Lydia Moore*, next door neighbor to the Fletchers, a spinster of seventy who retired five years earlier from working as a waitress in cheap restaurants. Large, truculent, outspoken.

ACTION: Takes place in the courtroom. Lydia Moore is on the witness stand.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY: Will you tell us in your own words what happened on the night Isabel Fletcher died?

LYDIA MOORE (*in a booming voice, no need to ask her to speak up*): They was always fighting about the air conditioning. She'd have it on all day till he come from work and shut it off. Them air conditioners was noisy-old things but better than nothing. Been hot enough to fry an egg on the sidewalk, like they say. He (*she looks expressionlessly at the defendant*) shut them air conditioners off, like I said, the minute he got home from work, and him and her'd be chewing over it the rest of the night. I heard them because he'd open the window. Said that'd cool off the place. Fat chance. She yells she can't stand it and the heat is killing her. He goes on about how expensive it is to run them air conditioners. Minded that more than anything, if you ask me, even more'n her not fixing the kind of food he likes—health stuff, y'know. Went on all the time about that, too.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (*as defense is about to object*): Please keep to the facts, Miss Moore.

LYDIA MOORE: Well, the facts is, then, that the night she died I couldn't sleep. Them air conditioners next door was still on, sounded like marbles going around in a washing machine. Around eleven o'clock, I looked out back and seen his car wasn't parked in their spot. I wondered where he was—he always come home by six.

About an hour later I heard this noise out back, sounded like cracking, maybe, just for a second it came sharp over the racket of them air conditioners. I got real keen ears. I was in bed, and my

windows was open. Couldn't sleep, though, like I said. Then the air conditioners next door finally shut off, and I heard the windows being raised. Had to be their bedroom windows, face the back same as mine. Creak, them windows do. I checked out back again. Car still wasn't there.

Then I seen him. Him. (*She nods toward the defendant.*) He come running out of that back door and took off down the alley.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY: How did you know it was the defendant?

LYDIA MOORE: First off, there's lights out back that burn all night, supposed to keep burglars away. Another thing, it had to be him because he kind of favors one leg. Ain't hardly noticeable when he walks, but he was tilting over to that side when he ran down the alley. Besides that, who else would shut off them air conditioners and raise the windows? A real burglar'd have to be crazy to do that. Wouldn't never even think of it.

*Objection by Defense Attorney sustained.*

*The defendant, Harlow Fletcher, is called to the stand. He has an aggressive manner.*

HARLOW FLETCHER: I never touched those air conditioners! I never raised the windows! I swear it. Lydia Moore has had it in for me ever since her dog died. She blamed it on me. Said I poisoned the little (*he catches himself*)—insisted I poisoned her dog.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY: Why would she say that?

HARLOW FLETCHER: I—uh—we had some words about the dog. Dogs are a hazard to health, you know. Fleas. Messes. Well, the dog died and she's lying now, to try to get back at me for that.

*Lydia Moore is recalled to the stand.*

DEFENSE ATTORNEY: You and the defendant had words about your dog?

LYDIA MOORE: Bitsy never bothered nobody. I had her ten years, since she was a puppy. She was a sweet little thing. Trusting. Somebody give her some poisoned meat while she was out on the porch. I was in the house, fixing dinner.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY: Did you suspect Mr. Fletcher?

LYDIA MOORE: Even if I did, it's my word against his, ain't it? I seen plenty of them murder stories on TV—gotta *prove* somebody's guilty. What I think ain't proof.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY: Please just answer the questions, Miss Moore. Will you tell us under what circumstances you found the body of Mrs. Fletcher?

LYDIA MOORE: Sure. When I seen him running down the alley, I

figured something's got to be wrong. I just up and took myself out back.

Their back door lock was broke, must have been the cracking sound I heard. Found her in bed, with a pillow over her face. Couldn't help her none, she was a goner.

I looked around. Drawers in the dresser pulled out, clothes lying around all over the place. I went back to my place and called the police. A little while after they come, *he* pulls up and parks his car and comes into that house, pretending he don't know what's happened.

*Move to strike from the record sustained.*

*Defendant Harlow Fletcher is recalled to the stand.*

DEFENSE ATTORNEY: Please tell us what you did on the evening your wife died.

HARLOW FLETCHER: I admit I was upset with Isabel over using the air conditioners so much. Got the electric bill that morning—couldn't believe it! Well, I decided not to go straight home from work that night. I was—unhappy, totally frustrated. That damned air conditioning gives me a sore throat. Causes arthritis, too, you know. I had polio as a kid, made me health conscious.

Anyway, I drove around for a while. Then I stopped to get some fruit and a package of sunflower seeds at a market, and I parked the car and ate and tried to decide what to do about things. Drove around a bit more, felt tired, so I parked again on some side street and I must have fallen asleep. Woke up after one, shocked it was so late. Drove home, and found the police there and Isabel dead.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY (*in cross-examination*): Let's get at the truth here. What actually happened was that you parked your car a few blocks away from the house that night, went through the alley to your back door, broke the lock to make it look like a burglar had entered, and went inside. Your wife was asleep. You murdered her by holding the pillow over her face until she suffocated; then you messed up the place to make it look like it had been ransacked. Force of habit tripped you up—or was it economy? Whatever—you raised the windows and shut off the air conditioners before you left through the alley. Later you returned, pretending innocence.

HARLOW FLETCHER: No, that's not true! Do you think I'm a fool? If I killed my wife, wouldn't I have sense enough to leave the air conditioners on and the windows closed? Those are the last things I'd do! It would be like hanging myself!

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY: Exactly!

## FINALE

Sitting in the rocker in her neat living room a week or so later, Lydia Moore smiled grimly as she read the newspaper account of the jury's finding against Harlow Fletcher. Folding the paper, she put it on the table next to her.

Her foot gently touched the soft old pillow on the floor at the side of her chair, the pillow that still held the indentation made by her dog's body.

There was a framed snapshot of Bitsy on the table showing the dog's fluffy tail aloft, her eyes bright and inquisitive. As though answering the question in those eyes, the old woman nodded. "It's okay, Bitsy. He got what he deserves."

She thought back to her conversation with Isabel Fletcher a few days after Bitsy died. On that particular morning they'd met out back by coincidence, each holding a sack of garbage to throw into the receptacle.

Mrs. Fletcher, not meeting Lydia's eyes, blurted out, "I'm sorry about your dog." Then she added bitterly, "Sometimes I think Harlow would like to get rid of me next."

Before Lydia could say anything, the woman scuttled away.

Now, leaning back in the rocker, Lydia relived the night she'd found Isabel Fletcher dead. First there was the shock, of course, and then remembering Isabel's words. She'd hurried back to her own place to telephone the police. Her hand was on the receiver when she'd paused to think.

True, she told herself, she *had* seen Harlow Fletcher running down the alley, but there would only be her word for that. She couldn't prove anything. Even repeating in court what Isabel Fletcher had said, what good would that do? It was what they called hearsay. You had to have proof.

It didn't take long to put on a pair of gloves. She knew she had to do that in order to prevent fingerprints. She went back next door and raised the windows and shut off the clattering air conditioners. And then she returned home to make the call to the police.

She took a deep, sighing breath. Nothing could bring Bitsy back to her, but at least Harlow Fletcher wouldn't get away with double murder, like he'd planned.

# LET'S EXCHANGE GIFTS THIS CHRISTMAS!

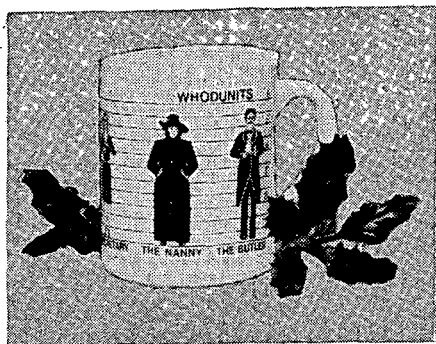
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FICTION



# Everything's Going Up

## by Thomasina Weber

**R**ocky Pinkerman started out on foot, hoping it wouldn't be too far. With all the one-way streets in this town, he couldn't take the chance of following the creep by car. His feet hurt, but they'd been hurting for a year now, ever since he'd put on that extra seventy-five pounds.

The downpour had given way to a drizzle and Rocky studied the man walking briskly in front of him, clutching several bags with the name of the used-book store emblazoned on them. The top of his head was bald and shiny from the rain, but long sandy wisps curled around his ears and dripped under his collar. He had a funny walk, too, sort of a waddle. Flat feet, Rocky decided.

The plan had been so simple. That's why Mr. Pendergast's plans always worked—they were simple. Mason Miller was to board the eight thirty bus in front of the bookstore, carrying one bag of books

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and one bag of money. Two bags, Mr. Pendergast had said, in case some do-gooder happened to notice him leaving the bus empty-handed and rushed after him with the money bag. He was to leave the money bag on the rear seat of the bus and get off at the next stop. Rocky, who would board the bus with him, would pick up the bag, get off at the following stop, and deliver the ransom to Mr. Pendergast, who would return Miller's daughter at ten P.M. as promised.

Rocky sighed. Yes, so simple, only Rocky had goofed it up by missing the bus. Allowing himself to be elbowed aside by more aggressive passengers, he had watched the door close before he could reach it. Another mistake to add to the series that had been plaguing him over the past months. He was able to rectify it, though, by rushing back to his car and beating the bus to the next stop.

Ready to swing aboard, he watched Miller get off the bus and walk slowly away, pausing only to look in the window of a closed thrift shop. The next passenger got off and Rocky stared. It was the creep who had come out of the bookstore behind Miller with several bags of books, only now it looked as if he had one extra. But it was hard to tell, the way he was carrying them.

Rocky's mind screamed with indecision. If he followed the creep and it turned out that he did not have an extra bag, someone else would find the drop on the bus. If he got on the bus and the bag wasn't there, he would have no way of locating the creep. Mentally, he tore at his hair. Someone pushed him, and then, muttering, moved around him and onto the bus. The creep was walking swiftly down the street. Rocky turned and followed him as the bus groaned its way back into the stream of traffic.

He wondered how much farther he would have to follow. The creep probably lived to hell and gone out at the county line. Rocky's stomach was burning, as usual. He must be getting an ulcer, and why shouldn't he, with the way his luck had been running lately.

Oh, at last, breathed Rocky as the creep climbed the stairs of an old apartment building. He wished he could have snatched the bags on the street and then Mr. Pendergast would never learn of his bungling, but Rocky couldn't take the chance of the creep's yelling and attracting attention. With his luck, there would be a patrol car right around the corner.

The glass door showed a lighted vestibule, and Rocky stepped up in time to see him closing his mailbox. It was the third one of four, and as soon as he had passed through the inner door, Rocky went

in and read the name tag. Then he began the interminable return trip to his car.

It was fully dark when Rocky stopped beside the public phone booth. The exercise had dried him out somewhat, but he had never felt so tired and achey in his life. Maybe he was coming down with something. Yeah, he told himself, something fatal. It's called old age. Fifty-four and not likely to reach fifty-five, if he kept goofing up. Maybe he ought to retire to one of those condominiums in Florida where all you do is sit in the sun and swim in the pool and play cards. Retire? Dreamer! He dropped a coin in the slot and dialed with a finger that felt a hundred years old.

"Hello, Mr. Pendergast? This is Rocky." He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand as he listened. He had to deposit two more coins before he got a chance to explain that he had missed the bus. It took only one more coin to learn that if he did not recover the bag immediately, he was a dead man.

Wearily, he returned to his car, opened the glove compartment and swallowed four antacid pills. It was nine thirty already. Mr. Pendergast had given him until ten thirty to deliver.

He drove back to the creep's neighborhood and found another phone booth.

"Mr. Henry Hackle?" he asked when his ring was answered. "This is the bus depot. We have a package here for you."

"For me? I'm not expecting anything."

"It's addressed to you and your phone number's on the tag."

There was an exasperated sigh on the other end of the line. Then, "I'll pick it up in the morning."

Rocky's heart jumped. It had been jumping a lot lately. Wasn't that an indication of heart disease? "It's marked 'perishable,' Mr. Hackle, and it's already been on the road for three days."

"Oh, all right. I'll come down now."

It wasn't hard to get into the apartment; Rocky was a graduate of that course. He looked around in amazement. Every available surface was cluttered with paperback books. How could the creep read all of them, and who in his right mind would want to?

After half an hour, he gave up the search. He had found the bags in the trash can, but no sign of their contents. His eyes filled with tears. Old and senile, that's what he was, feeling sorry for himself, but justifiably so. It wasn't fair that he should have all this bad luck.

"Who are you?"

Rocky's heart hit his tonsils as he focused on the creep standing

in the doorway. Not only old and senile, but stupid besides, letting himself be caught like this.

The creep looked mad, but he was smaller than Rocky, so Rocky drew himself up tall and decided to brazen it out. "You took something of mine off the bus," he said. "I want it back."

The creep's eyes narrowed and Rocky wondered if he imagined the look of guilt there. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know, all right, Hackle. That bag you picked up."

Henry walked to the phone. "Maybe we'd better let the police settle this."

Rocky felt the tears returning and he sank heavily into a chair. "Don't call the police, Mr. Hackle. You don't know what I've been through today."

"Well, I don't exactly appreciate wild goose chases in the middle of the night and then uninvited guests when I get back."

"I'm really sorry about that."

Hackle smiled. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"Would I?" He looked up as Henry went into the kitchen. "Mr. Hackle, you're not a creep after all."

Sipping the steaming coffee, Rocky said, "You look like an all-right guy, so I'll level with you. Miller, the owner of Miller Supermarkets, had books in one bag and money in the other. The package he left on the bus was ransom for his daughter that I was supposed to pick up, only I missed the bus."

"You're a kidnapper?"

"I'm not smart enough to be a kidnapper. I'm only the pickup man." The corners of his mouth dropped. "I guess I'm not smart enough to be a pickup man any more, either." He took another sip of coffee. "When I called my boss, he said get the money back or he'd have me killed." Henry Hackle said nothing. "You look as if you don't believe it."

"Of course I believe it. I don't read detective novels for nothing."

"Then you can see the bind I'm in. So if you'll just hand it over, I'll be on my way."

"I can't do that."

Rocky's eyes widened. "Why not?"

"Because I didn't pick up anything on the bus."

"Don't give me that. When I was waiting to get on the bus, I saw you heading for the back seat right behind Mr. Miller."

"I always sit on the rear seat. I don't like people looking over my shoulder."

"Then you saw the bag he put down, and you picked it up."

"No, I didn't."

Rocky studied the man's face. "Do you realize that my life is in that bag?"

"Of course, so I hope you don't think I'd be the cause of your demise. Someone else must have picked it up. Look—uh—what's your name, anyway?"

"Rocky."

"Okay, Rocky. If I had picked up a sack of money, do you think I'd be sitting home tonight, reading a book?"

"Maybe. If you worked hard all day, you might not feel like going out on the town until the weekend."

"One day is the same as the next to me. I don't have to work."

"What do you live on?"

"Welfare, of course. I don't have expensive tastes and I get along very well on what they give me. I think people with burning ambitions are wasting their time. Why knock yourself out for a lousy job? Besides, I wouldn't have time to read if I had a job."

"That don't prove nothing."

"Rocky, do you know what I had for dinner? A peanut butter sandwich. Now, do you think I would have had a peanut butter sandwich if I had just found a bagful of money?"

"No, I guess you wouldn't."

"Well, that's settled."

"Yeah, but what about me? The boss gave me till—" He stopped, his tongue turned to cotton. He didn't dare look at his watch.

"What's the matter, Rocky?"

"It's after ten, isn't it?"

"It's ten thirty."

Rocky was as good as dead. He groped for his antacid pills, but he had left them in the car. Well, he might not have to put up with his ulcer much longer anyway. A loud buzz jolted him. "What's that?"

"Someone at the door. Who is it?" Henry said into the speaker.

"Western Union."

Rocky tried to protest, but his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. Dry mouth: that was a symptom of—what?

When Henry opened the door, Mason Miller charged into the room and grabbed the front of Henry's shirt. "Where is she?" Miller demanded, shaking him.

"Who?"

"My daughter. You said she'd be returned at ten."

"I don't know anything about your daughter," Henry chattered.

"The hell you don't! I saw you pick up the ransom I left on the bus, and I followed you just in case you did doublecross me."

"Even if I did pick it up, which I didn't, you couldn't have seen me because you took a seat three rows in front of me."

"Well, you were carrying book bags."

"Lots of people buy books at that shop."

Miller lashed out and Henry went down. Then Miller was astride him, raising his shoulders and smashing them down against the bare floor:

"You'll tell me where she is or I'll beat your head in."

Rocky jumped to his feet and pulled Miller away before he could bounce Henry again. "Leave my friend alone," he said, shoving him into a chair. "You got a lot of nerve busting in here like that, Mr. Miller." Henry had taken refuge in another chair. "Nobody's to blame for an accident."

"What accident?"

"It's obvious that somebody else picked up the ransom—some stranger, who thought it was a bag of books."

"You're nuts!"

"That makes sense," said Henry.

"Who are you trying to kid?"

"He's telling the truth, Mr. Miller," Rocky said. "I'm the one who was supposed to pick it up."

"Then you tell me where my daughter is and why she wasn't returned."

"I already told you," said Rocky patiently. "The ransom wasn't paid."

"But I *did* leave the money."

"As far as my boss is concerned, you didn't pay it. And I think you owe Mr. Hackle an apology."

"Call me Henry," Henry said to Rocky.

"Gee, thanks, Henry."

"Cut the social hour! I want my daughter back or somebody's going to pay."

"You are, Mr. Miller," said Rocky.

"I already *did*!"

"Well, you'll just have to get another bundle."

"Another—"

"Don't cry poor, Mr. Miller. I know the prices you charge in your supermarkets. The way I see it, you don't have no choice. You want I should call the boss and explain?"

Miller, stony-faced, said nothing. "You wouldn't hesitate if you

knew the boss like I know him," Rocky went on. "He'd as soon kill your daughter as look at her. As a matter of fact—" Rocky's stomach began to burn in double time—"he's going to kill me now because I didn't deliver the money. So you'll be responsible for my murder as well as your daughter's. And Henry here will tell the police all about it, won't you?" Henry nodded. "Well, Mr. Miller?"

"Call him."

Rocky dialed the number and waited, hoping it was not too late. "Hello, Mr. Pen—" He caught himself just in time. He really must be suffering from an advanced case of stupidity. "This is Rocky." He listened, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, thankful no one else could hear the voice on the other end of the wire.

"Well—you see—there's been a mixup. Yeah. You—you told me that before. Yes, I know what time it is. I hope you haven't—I mean—she's all right, isn't she?"

Suddenly the phone was snatched out of his hand and Miller was shouting into it. "Listen you, whoever you are, I want my daughter back unharmed. If anything happens to her—" He stopped talking then turned his flushed face toward Rocky. "He hung up."

Rocky shook his head. "You shouldn't have talked to him like that, Mr. Miller. He don't like people who give him a lot of mouth." Miller sat down and ran his fingers through his hair. "I'll call him back and tell him you're sorry. Okay, Mr. Miller?" He nodded and Rocky placed the call.

"It's Rocky again," he said. "Mr. Miller wants for me to tell you he's sorry he yelled at you. Tell him to go where? Wait a minute, Mr. Pen—wait, don't hang up. He really is sorry. What he wants is to make new arrangements. Do you want to follow the same plan? You don't? Okay, tell me where." Rocky listened a while longer; then broke the connection.

"I take it the girl's all right," said Henry from the depths of his chair.

"Yeah, but she won't be if anything goes wrong this time. Mr. Miller, you're to take the money to the side entrance of the public library at half-past midnight and your daughter will be delivered in the morning."

Miller crossed to the door. "I'll be there."

"Oh—Mr. Miller." Rocky's hands twisted nervously in front of him. "There's just one thing. Mr.—I mean—he said to tell you it will be thirty-five thousand this time."

"Thirty-five! But it was only twenty-five today."

Rocky shrugged. "That's what he said."

The door slammed and Rocky and Henry were alone. "I'm pooped," said Rocky.

"You're still alive."

"Yeah, for now. Believe it or not, I used to be one of the smartest in the business. But I'm over the hill, Henry, and nobody retires from a job like mine."

"Nobody's going to kill you, Rocky."

"Didn't you learn nothing from those books you read?"

"They're only fiction. People aren't like that."

"Believe me, pal, they're like that."

Rocky was grateful when Henry suggested that, in that case, he would be wise to spend what was left of the night in Henry's apartment. He brought him a blanket, then went to his own room and closed the door.

Rocky was too tired to go to sleep. Mr. Pendergast had assigned a new man to pick up the drop, and Rocky knew that missing the bus was the last mistake he would be allowed to make. If he was smart, he would get in his car right now and head out of town, but he just couldn't do it. He had never been so exhausted in his life, and his stomach was killing him. Not only that, but with Mr. Pendergast's connections, it would be a simple matter for him to find the motel into which a fat man had checked in the middle of the night. Better to get a few hours' sleep—after all, Mr. Pendergast didn't know where Rocky was—and then leave early in the morning.

He tried to relax by glancing at the gaudy book covers surrounding him. Spotting one that deserved a closer look, he reached for it, knocking over the small pile on top of the TV set. As they fell, a twenty dollar bill fluttered out from between the pages of one.

Ten minutes later Rocky opened Henry's door and switched on the overhead light.

"Hey!" Henry sat up in bed, squinting.

"That's a valuable book collection you got there, Henry."

Henry sighed. "You won't believe this, but when I opened the bag, I was disappointed when it didn't have any books in it."

"I'm sure the money will help you get over it."

"It will buy a lot of paperbacks," conceded Henry.

"It will buy me a ticket to Mexico," said Rocky.

"It would, if it were yours."

"Don't get the wrong idea, Henry. I believe in fair play. Fifty-fifty sound fair to you?"

"Not under the circumstances."

"Gee, Henry, I thought we were friends. But as long as you want



to be like that, I can take all of it. I'm sure my boss would like to know who really took that money."

The color drained from Henry's face. "You wouldn't do a thing like that to a buddy, would you?"

"Of course not. That's why I'll split fifty-fifty with you."

"You're all right, Rocky. Now, you'd better get some sleep."

Rocky watched the sun coming up on his left side as his car headed for Florida. What a beautiful time of day, and to think he had been missing it all these years by rising late. Never too old to learn, he told himself. He inhaled appreciatively, happy in the thought that he would, after all, live to grow old.

After Henry's door had closed, Rocky had put his mind to his future. He had not failed to notice Henry's close attention to the phone conversation in which Mr. Pendergast had outlined the new ransom arrangements and which Rocky duly relayed to Miller. He had not thought much about it at the time, but afterwards, when he learned what kind of person Henry really was, it came to him that Henry was planning to arrive before the pickup man and snatch that ransom, too. Rocky could not allow that because if Mr. Pendergast did not get the money, he would kill the girl.

Rocky had quietly left the apartment and hurried to the corner phone booth. Mr. Miller had been so grateful when Rocky phoned. He told Rocky that he didn't trust Henry either, and that Rocky had really used his head in specifying twelve thirty when the real time to leave the money was midnight. He was so grateful he even offered Rocky a steady job in one of his supermarkets, marking up prices.

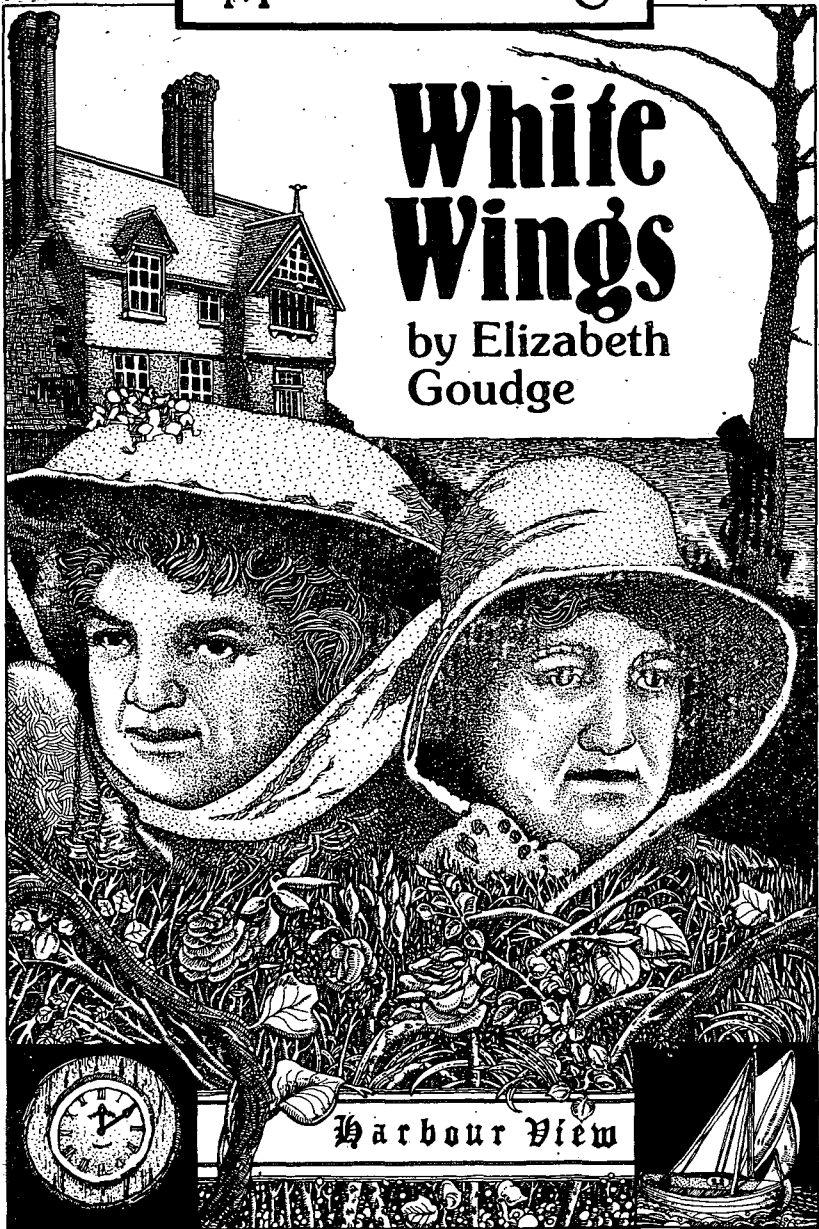
Rocky was waiting when Miller made the drop, and when he was out of sight, Rocky retrieved the money and left. Henry would be upset at missing the ransom, but even more furious when he discovered his whole paperback crop had been harvested. It was only right that Rocky take it, for he did not have the security of welfare behind him.

For the first time in years, Rocky felt like a million dollars. Nothing hurt, ached, or burned. The two ransoms, invested wisely, would be more than enough to support him for the rest of his life. By now, thanks to Rocky's second telephone call, Mr. Pendergast would be in the clutches of the police, Mr. Miller's daughter safe in the arms of her father. Mr. Miller had paid dearly for his daughter, but Rocky wasted no sympathy on him. After all, even for a man like Mr. Miller, these days everything's going up.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# White Wings

by Elizabeth Goudge



**F**airhaven, the little town where Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria lived, was built beside the river where it widened to the sea. It was an old town, whose sons had been sailors for generations, and boats and fish and the weather were, and had always been, the chief preoccupation of the people, gentle and simple, who lived there. The very names of the streets and houses echoed the thoughts of the men and women who tramped up and down on the cobbles and sat behind the geraniums in the narrow windows: Fish Street, Nelson Square, Ship Hill, Trafalgar Place, Harbour View, the Moorings.

The town was built on the side of a hill, and all the streets fell steeply to the harbor, as though in a hurry to see how fast they could get there and look out across the smooth, sun-dappled water to the ever-changing shores across the estuary that were now blue, now green, now lilac-colored, but always beautiful; or to the haze of smoke that hung over the big town to the north, or the bar of white across the river to the south that showed where it met the sea. A good deal of traffic went up and down the river: pleasure steamers, tramp steamers, big yachts belonging to rich people that made their way arrogantly downstream to the sea, and little yachts painted red and blue and green whose white woven wings darted about like those of butterflies, and the houses of the little town were all built very high so that they could look over each other's shoulders at the excitement down below. Flights of steep stone steps led up to the front doors under the curiously carved triangular porches that sat on them like hats, the tiled roofs were weather-stained and irregular, and over the crooked chimneys the smoke was always dancing in the wind from the sea.

The High Street was the glory of the town, containing as it did the church, the Town Hall, the lovely bow-windowed shops, and four public houses. You could buy all the necessities of life in the shops; fishing rods, soap, sardines, and sunbonnets; and the beer at the Mermaid Inn, the Crab and Lobster, and the Anchor was the purest of the pure. The High Street, like all the other streets, ran downhill, and on each side of it was a pavement raised high above the sloping street, with rails like the rails of a ship to prevent pedestrians falling over into the sea of traffic below. The traffic changed with the centuries, sedan chairs and coaches giving place to dogcarts and victorias, and they in their turn to bicycles and motors, but the high pavements and the old rails remained the same.

Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria had seen a good deal of change in

the fifty years that had passed since they and their father, the Admiral, first went to live at Harbour View, the beautiful house at the top of the hill. They had been lovely young girls in those days, though even then rather old fashioned in their ways, and the Admiral had been very fond of them so long as they did not cross him in any way. He had married young, and lost his wife a few years after marriage, so that he had brought up his daughters himself, with the help of a succession of strait-laced governesses, and was proud of the fact. He had been one of those men who consider that a woman should be in everything a man's opposite; he himself had had an adventurous life, allowing himself perfect freedom in all matters of manners and morals, so he had kept Syringa and Gloria shut up in Harbour View as in a box, dressed in white muslin with blue ribbon at the waist, pruned their manners vigorously, and stormed for an hour if they so much as peeped over the geraniums in the parlor window at a man across the way; he whose language had been in his heyday unequalled for its richness and who had had a sweetheart in every port. . . . But he had loved them. . . . He had allowed them unlimited supplies of white muslin with blue ribbon and had showed the door to the various young men who aspired to be their husbands, for no man in his eyes had been worthy of either of them.

But youth is a guest who does not stay long, and death is a restless traveler whose hand knocks at one door after another, sparing none, and Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria were old women when the Admiral died, and as unfitted as they could be to face the world outside the doors of Harbour View and the poverty that drove them into it. For the Admiral had been one of those arrogant men who are unable to think of death in connection with themselves, or of misfortune in connection with their children. Other men died, other men's children had to face not the perfect life that parents dream of for their children but life as it is, yet he had apparently thought that neither death nor life would dare to lay violent hands on him or his. He had lived for the moment only, with his fine yacht upon the river, fine food and drink upon his table, and priceless treasures filling the rooms of his lovely house, and when his debts had been paid there was next to nothing for Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria to live upon.

Mr. Pepper, the old lawyer who had helped the Admiral mismanage his affairs for fifty years, was at a loss as to what to do with Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria. Obviously they could not teach, for anything they had ever known they had now forgotten; nor

could they be companions to rich old ladies because there were at the moment no rich old ladies in Fairhaven, and Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria flatly refused to leave their beloved town; nor could they be housekeepers, for economy was the last thing for which the Admiral's wild extravagance had fitted them. Old Mr. Pepper was frankly nonplussed, and Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria, overwhelmed with grief as they were, gave him no help.

It was not only the Admiral's death that had upset them, though of course they missed his cheery oaths and his stamping feet about the house and mourned for him most sincerely, but even more the thought of parting from Harbour View and the treasures that were in it.

If fate had never allowed them to leave their home it had in compensation given them a burning love for it that was almost fanatical. The house itself, with its mellow red brick walls, the bow windows and wide front door and old fashioned garden, seemed to them a paradise, and the treasures that filled it were as dear to them as their children would have been. . . . How was it possible to part from the beautiful Sheraton furniture, the four-poster beds, the Bristol glass, and the Chelsea and Rockingham china that were their very life! Yet old Mr. Pepper assured them that these things must be sold if they were to move to the lodgings that were all he could think of for them if they could not, as obviously they could not, hope for professional work.

"Live in lodgings!" exclaimed Miss Syringa in indignation. "My dear young man, I would sooner keep a shop!" She did not realize, any more than did Miss Gloria, that time passes, and old Mr. Pepper, now so bald and withered, was still to her the diffident young man they had patronized so kindly when they first came to Fairhaven. "I would sooner," she iterated, "keep a shop!" Nothing, she felt, could be so lowering to their family as the descent to trade.

"Well," said Miss Gloria, "why not keep a shop?"

The spectacles fell from the noses of Miss Syringa and old Mr. Pepper, and they gazed at her in speechless horror. The three of them were sitting in the beautiful parlor at Harbour View. On the mantelpiece were the charming Chelsea figures of shepherds and shepherdesses, and on a table against the wall were the Rockingham lambs, the little china dogs with blue ribbons round their necks, and the loveliest treasure of all, a slender ship modeled in silver, that had been their mother's, a beautiful thing with silver sails like the wings of a bird. On the walls hung miniatures and watercolors, some of them of value, and every piece of furniture in

the room was a work of art. . . . Miss Gloria looked round at all these things, and her great idea began to take form in her mind.

"What I mean," she said, brandishing her knitting needles, "is this. If our lovely things must be sold, why not sell them ourselves? Why not keep what they call an antique shop here in Fairhaven? We get lots of visitors here in the summer, and people on holidays are always in a mood to spend money."

"My dear Gloria," said Miss Syringa, when she could speak, "have you gone mad?"

Old Mr. Pepper, on his hands and knees on the floor retrieving his spectacles from under the sofa, looked up at Miss Gloria with admiration. . . . He had not known she had it in her. . . . She was the younger, and she had always seemed the meeker of the two sisters; a little mouse of a woman with smooth gray hair strained back from a girlish little face, and pale blue eyes blinking in a bewildered way behind her glasses; yet here she was coming out with what was positively a bright idea.

"Gloria," said Miss Syringa, "I am ashamed of you."

Miss Syringa had always seemed to Mr. Pepper a more decided character. She was as fragile and as pink and white as Miss Gloria, and had the same pale blue eyes and smooth gray hair, but she had in addition the Admiral's hooked nose, and the prominence of this feature gave to her countenance a look of force that had always alarmed Mr. Pepper. . . . Quite unnecessarily.

"Why?" said Miss Gloria. "If our darlings must be sold in any case, would it not be best for us to sell them ourselves? We should at least be able to see who bought them and give instruction for their care, and we should lose them only gradually." At this she choked a little, and her blue eyes, fixed on the Rockingham lambs, filled with tears.

Anyone would have thought that the lambs were creatures of flesh and blood who could feel physical pain; and it is possible that Miss Gloria thought they were, for she washed them with her own hands every Monday morning and was always careful to see that the water was not too hot and the soap did not get in their eyes.

"I think," said old Mr. Pepper, "that Miss Gloria has had a very good idea. A very good idea indeed. A little capital will be required, of course, but the sale of the house will bring us that. . . . I congratulate you, Miss Gloria, I do most heartily congratulate you."

Miss Syringa burst into floods of tears but she was nevertheless vanquished. . . . Her nose was quite misleading.



Harbour View was sold, and of what Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria suffered when they saw it pass out of their hands into those of a retired publican it is better not to think. They themselves were established by Mr. Pepper in a beautiful little house in the High Street, with a charming parlor behind the bow-windowed shop and an airy, raftered bedroom above that was really beautiful. There was a small garden, too, but there was no view of the river and the ships either from the garden or from any of the windows of the house, and Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria pined and withered.

But they nevertheless showed a courage that Mr. Pepper would not have expected of them and threw themselves wholeheartedly into the management of their shop. He was surprised at their energy. He did not know that it was mostly directed toward displaying in the window the things that they cared for least and hiding their special treasures well out of sight. "In case," whispered Miss Gloria to Miss Syringa, "just in case the Unexpected should happen and we should return to Harbour View."

What this Unexpected could be she did not specify. She did not know herself. It was just that something, rose-tinted and lovely and waiting just round the corner, that every normal human being believes in so ardently and lives for with such hope.

So they put the heavy pieces of Sheffield plate in the window, and the rather garish tea service that they had never really cared for, but they put the lovely ruby Bristol glass in the shadows, and as for the Rockingham lambs and the silver ship, they hid them away altogether.

The shop was a success. The beauty of Fairhaven attracted more and more summer visitors as time went by, and not the least of Fairhaven's attractions was the old antique shop filled with genuine treasures and kept by the two charming old ladies in their dove-gray dresses. Outwardly Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria were prosperous, and greatly envied, but inwardly they suffered torment as one by one their treasures left them and the Unexpected did not happen.

Customers were amused at what they called "the unbusinesslike methods" of the little old ladies.

"Are you sure you can afford it, dear?" Miss Gloria said to a girl who held between her fingers the long chain of amber from the Adriatic that the Admiral had given Gloria on her twentieth birthday. And the girl, noting the anxiety in the blue eyes behind the



spectacles and mistaking its reason, laughed and was all the more eager to possess those strung globes of clotted sunshine. . . . And Miss Glòria, as she packed up the amber with trembling fingers, remembered the line of a poem, "And each tear gleams a drop of amber." The yellow globes were not drops of sunshine to her, but the unshed tears of her heart.

"But have you anywhere to put it?" Miss Syringa said to a young man who had taken a violent fancy to the Admiral's favorite toy, a small brass telescope that he had had placed on the table beside him when he was dying, so that from his bed he could watch the ships go up and down the estuary. "I wouldn't like you, just for a passing whim, to burden yourself with a bulky oddment whose purchase you may afterward regret."

The young man had been in two minds as to whether to get the telescope or not, but the little old lady's apparent concern for his welfare touched him deeply. Laughing, he plunged his hands in his pockets and brought up two handfuls of jingling change.

"Be careful of it," Miss Syringa adjured him as she packed up the telescope. "Do you know some competent woman who would dust it for you? Don't, I implore you, dust it yourself."

## 3

Very few visitors came to Fairhaven in the winter, and this was a source of grievance to the tradespeople, and to the sailors who owned and let out for hire the little colored yachts with their white woven wings, but to Miss Syringa and Miss Glòria it was a source of happiness. The cold winds swept up from the sea and rattled the ill-fitting windows of their old house, the drafts crept under the doors like knives, and they could not afford really satisfactory fires, but they did not care, for their treasures were safe. . . . The ruby Bristol glass could bloom like roses in the shadows, and no one would see it and pluck it away, the Chelsea shepherds could play their pipes to the Rockingham lambs, and the china dogs could skip and run all round the shop and back again, and the music and the skipping would attract no birds of prey. . . . And as for the silver ship, Miss Syringa actually dared sometimes to bring it out of hiding and put it on the table, so that in the fleeting winter sunshine its sails gleamed white as the wings that danced up and down on the river in the summer.

And then one night the Unexpected happened. It was not at all the sort of thing that Miss Glòria had been expecting, but being

the Unexpected it naturally couldn't expect to be. The important moments of life never arrive with a fanfare of trumpets; they slip noiselessly out of the dark and the rain and scratch at the door so softly that their coming is at first neither seen nor heard.

"What was that, Syringa?" said Miss Gloria, as they sat one evening in November before their parlor fire, with their skirts turned back on their knees, their knitting in their hands, and the cat asleep at their feet. They were quite alone because Mrs. Barnes, who "did" for them by day, had gone home.

"What was what, Gloria?" snapped Miss Syringa. . . . Miss Gloria had spoken so suddenly that she had dropped a stitch.

"That knocking," said Miss Gloria.

Miss Syringa listened, but the wind was roaring in the chimney and the rain pattering against the windowpanes, and she could hear nothing.

"There!" said Miss Gloria, raising an apprehensive finger.

There came a lull in the storm, and then Miss Syringa could hear it: a gentle knocking at the street door.

"Now, Gloria, don't get flustered!" said Miss Syringa, dropping a whole bunch of stitches, knocking her spectacles crooked, and kicking the cat. "There is nothing whatever to be alarmed about. . . . Keep calm."

"I am not flustered," said Miss Gloria, and she straightened her sister's spectacles and soothed the cat before walking quietly down the passage to the street door.

But she had hard work not to be flustered when the flickering light from the street lamp revealed the very spirit of the storm standing upon her doorstep. A black cloak streamed in the wind, and a pair of fierce eyes were fixed on her.

"My goodness me!" she exclaimed, and recoiled a few steps backward upon the cat. . . . But only a few steps because Miss Gloria was a courageous woman.

"Excuse me, mum," said the apparition.

She breathed again. This was a man, not a ghost, and Miss Gloria was seldom afraid of natural things, only supernatural, and although a tramp upon one's doorstep is not pleasant, it is in no way unusual.

"'Ave ye such a thing as a shed or summat out the back where a poor man could spend the night, mum?" inquired the tramp. "Cleaned out, I am, my last bob gone."

A strong aroma of beer filled the little passage, suggesting where it had gone to, and Miss Gloria drew herself up with considerable

dignity, her hands severely folded at the waist. "My good man," she said, "the place for you is the workhouse."

"Maybe," said the tramp, "but I'm not fond of the 'ouse. I don't fancy the company I meet there."

There was hint of arrogance in his tone that reminded Miss Gloria of the Admiral. His fierce eyes, too, under their bushy brows, were strongly reminiscent of the Admiral; and his burly broad-shouldered figure. She bent forward and looked at him more attentively. A torn old oilskin cloak covered his ragged clothes and the remnant of an oilskin hat was jammed down on his head. He had a rosy, weather-beaten face with a fringe of gray whiskers and beard round it, and a disarming, toothless grin.

"You are an old sailor," said Miss Gloria, and the warmth in her tone caused the tramp to place one booted foot firmly over the doorstep.

"I am, mum. Sailed the seven seas, I 'ave. But I'm getting on in years, mum, and I can't seem to get another ship."

There was no whining in his tone, but he had placed the other foot over the doorstep and was standing beside Miss Gloria in the passage, hat in hand, before she had realized it.

"We have a little shed at the bottom of the garden. We keep the firewood there."

She had not meant to say this, but to her intense surprise she distinctly heard herself saying it.

"I knew I'd struck lucky, mum," said the old sailor. "When I saw that pretty ship I knew it was an Omen."

"What ship?" asked Miss Gloria.

"That silver ship on the table. . . . When ye shut up shop tonight, mum, ye forgot to lower the blinds. . . . That ship, mum, is the very spit of the one I sailed in when I was a boy. When I saw it I knew it was an Omen right enough."

Deep called to deep. Miss Gloria with her belief in the Unexpected, and the sailor with his faith in Omens, both belonged to that company of the ever-young-at-heart to whom life at its grayest still holds the promise of a fairy tale.

"Come this way," said Miss Gloria.

"Thank ye, mum," said the sailor simply. "My name's 'Erbert Jenks."

But on their way down the passage they encountered Miss Syringa, issuing all of a twitter from the parlor.

"Gloria!" she gasped. "What on earth are you doing?"

"This is Jenks," said Miss Gloria. "He is spending the night in

our woodshed. Just move, dear, will you, so that we can get by?"

Miss Syringa felt a little faint and groped with her hand for the wall behind her. "But didn't he see the notice on the door, 'No hawkers, no circulars'?" she whispered.

"Jenks," said Miss Gloria, "is neither a hawker nor a circular. He is an old sailor. Just step aside, dear. That's right. While we're gone, you might be looking for the frying pan, and there are rashers in the larder. Jenks would like a bite of supper, I dare say."

She was gone, Jenks following her, and Miss Syringa was left clinging speechlessly to the door handle.

## 4

Herbert Jenks had always known a good thing when he saw it, and by next morning he knew that the woodshed was a good thing. He decided that what the old ladies needed was a handyman about the place. It took him five minutes to get Miss Gloria to see eye to eye with him, two days to get Miss Syringa to give in against her better judgment, and five days to convince Mrs. Barnes, the daily woman, that it was not a scrap of use her arguing any longer and she might as well keep her mouth shut, but by the end of the week they were all four in at least outward agreement. With an oil stove, a scrap of carpet, and some old rugs, together with a few oddments culled from neighboring dustbins, he had the woodshed shipshape in no time and dug himself in as though he meant to stay forever. . . . And indeed Miss Gloria hoped he would, for he was incredibly useful. . . . He scrubbed the floors, cleaned the windows, ran errands, looked after the garden, and did all the thousand and one odd jobs that, added to the daily routine work of the house, seem to a woman just the last straw. He was hardworking, good tempered, sober more often than not, and Miss Gloria vowed that he was honest.

But Miss Syringa had her suspicions, founded on his passionate affection for the silver ship.

"He knows it to be a thing of value," she said one day to Miss Gloria. "Believe me, Gloria, I came into the shop this morning, when Jenks should have been polishing the floor, and there he was standing beside the ship stroking its sails with his finger." She shut her mouth with a snap and re-perched her glasses on her aquiline nose with some severity.

"Ah, dear Jenks!" said Miss Gloria, and a sweet mist of affection obscured her sight for a moment. "He loves that ship, dear, because

it reminds him of a ship of his boyhood, and because it was the Omen that led him to this quiet haven of peace."

"Pooh!" said Miss Syringa.

All through that cold and stormy winter Jenks seemed utterly contented, thankful for a roof over his head and good food in his stomach, but when the spring came he seemed to get restless. He showed an increasing tendency to leave his work undone and slip off down to the harbor, where he would sit in the sun on the harbor wall smoking his old clay pipe, watching the ships go up and down and talking to the old ferryman and to all and sundry who were wise in the ways of the sea. Finally he spent so much time absenting himself from his labors that Miss Gloria was obliged to waylay him in the garden and remonstrate with him.

He was penitent as a chidden child. "Ye're right, mum," he declared. "I've been a proper waster lately, so I 'ave. . . . The fact is, mum, I'm 'ungering for the sea."

"Ah!" said Miss Gloria with deep sympathy. "I thought that was it, Jenks." Then she swallowed hard and made a suggestion of the utmost nobility. "Should you hear of any other employment, Jenks, something of a seafaring nature more suited to your tastes, you must not hesitate to leave us."

"I couldn't get a ship now, mum, not at my age, but if I was to save a bit of money—" He paused and spat ruminatively; the one thing that Miss Gloria disliked was his habit of spitting; but she could not bring herself to ask him not to. It was such an indelicate thing to have to mention, and there was no doubt that the habit helped him to formulate his thoughts.

"Yes?" she encouraged.

"I could buy part share in a fishing boat, mum. I come from Yarmouth way, and there's many an old pal up there would be glad to take me into partnership if I 'ad a bit of money." He paused, straightened himself, and smiled his engaging toothless smile. "But there ye are, mum, I 'aven't, and ain't likely to. And I'm grateful to ye, mum, for your kindness, and ye won't find me neglecting me work in future."

Miss Gloria beamed on him and went indoors to arrange with Miss Syringa about the raising of his wages. . . . But she did not repeat their conversation.

ures filled the-shop window, while the Rockingham lambs retired back again into the dark corners and the silver ship was hidden away under a soup tureen.

The behavior of Jenks was once more exemplary, and even the heart of Miss Syringa warmed to him at last; indeed it was to Jenks that she ran in distress when she discovered that the George the First teapot had disappeared. Miss Gloria was out, and she rushed down the garden to him all of a twitter, with her spectacles awry on her Roman nose and her pretty little mouth pouting in childish distress.

"'Oo's bin in the shop, mum?" demanded Jenks at once, flinging down his spade and spitting vigorously upon his hands as though ready instantly to wring the neck of the thief.

"A party of tourists," twittered Miss Syringa.

"Did ye leave 'em alone there?" demanded Jenks.

"Yes," cried poor Miss Syringa. "But only for a moment, Jenks, while I fetched my spectacles."

"Ah!" said Jenks, and there was so much kindly rebuke in his tone that tears sprang to Miss Syringa's eyes.

"Only for a moment, Jenks," she pleaded; "and you know I can't see the price tickets without my glasses."

"And the teapot was there when ye left the shop?" asked Jenks.

"Yes—no—at least—yes, I'm sure it was," stammered Miss Syringa. The reproach in Jenks's eyes quite unnerved her, and she couldn't really feel sure of anything.

"I'll go for Barnes," said Jenks, and went off at the double.

Barnes was the husband of Mrs. Barnes and the very largest of the Fairhaven policemen. There were not many policemen in Fairhaven, because it was such a law-abiding place, and Barnes was bigger than all the rest of them put together.

Barnes came at once, even though it was his dinner hour and he had taken no more than three mouthfuls of beefsteak pudding and one draft of stout, indeed he came so fast that the High Street rocked beneath his tread. . . . Like everyone else in Fairhaven he was very fond of the old ladies.

He stood in the shop, with his head touching the ceiling and his elbows all but touching the walls on either side, and took copious notes in his notebook while Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria (who had now returned) stood by answering questions and ready to move their treasures quickly out of the way of his feet if he made a movement. He took endless trouble over his notes, sucking his stumpy pencil loudly and enthusiastically between each entry and

breathing stertorously through his nose, indeed he took so long over them that, by the time he had finished, the charabanc that had brought the tourists to Fairhaven was thirty miles away in no one knew which direction. . . . So the George the First teapot was not recovered.

A week later an old snuffbox was missing, but it was not until a month had gone by that the silver ship disappeared.

It was as though there had been a death in the family. Miss Syringa cried till her Roman nose was scarlet and she could scarcely see out of her eyes, but Miss Gloria did not cry at all. "Its wings were white when the sun shone on them," was all she said, but she aged ten years in a night.

The old ladies were too stricken to take steps, and it was Mrs. Barnes who told Barnes of the bereavement. . . . He whistled. . . . There had been several other losses in Fairhaven lately; Major Stone had missed a valuable shooting stick, left by him for only one moment outside his front door, and General Grey's gold cigarette case, lost by him while fishing at the harbor, was not returned to the police station in answer to the "Reward" notice posted outside; people began to pass remarks about the corpulency and inefficiency of the Fairhaven police and Barnes's blood was up.

The next day, when Jenks was out on an errand and Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria were busy in the shop, Barnes spent a considerable time prowling about at the back of the house.

And the next day was early closing day. When the shop was shut, Jenks went off as usual to spend his afternoon fishing at the harbor and Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria went upstairs to array themselves in their best to drink tea with the rector's wife. The folds of their shabby gray dresses were just shaken out and adjusted and their cameo brooches pinned in the lace under their chins, when Mrs. Barnes knocked at the door.

"You're wanted at the station, m'm," she said through the keyhole.

"The police station?" gasped Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria.

"Yes, m'm. At once, m'm. You'll find Barnes there."

Barnes was there, seated behind a table and swollen by satisfaction to twice his usual size, and beside him, in the grip of the second-largest Fairhaven policeman, stood Jenks. . . . On the table before Barnes was the silver ship.

A wave of faintness swept over Miss Syringa; she sank to a chair and fumbled in her reticule for her smelling salts. But Miss Gloria remained in a vertical position, and her gaze met the gaze of



Jenks. . . . No eyes had ever looked at her as his were doing except the eyes of a lost dog she had once encountered in the High Street.

"Now, m'm," said Barnes, perching his pince-nez on his nose and wetting his forefinger preparatory to turning over the leaves of his notebook. "I want you to identify this 'ere ship as your property. Just a matter of routine."

Once again the eyes of Miss Gloria and Jenks met, and the bond that was between them, that bond that links the ever-young-at-heart to whom life never ceases to be magical, tightened and held.

"What a pretty ship!" said Miss Gloria.

"Yes, m'm," said Barnes with some impatience. "Just identify it as your property, m'm, if you please."

"That is not my ship," said Miss Gloria.

Miss Syringa choked, tried to speak, and could not.

"Not your ship, m'm?" bellowed Barnes in sudden ire.

"No," said Miss Gloria.

"No?" roared Barnes.

"No," said Miss Gloria. "It is Jenks's own ship. I gave it to him."

## 6

But Miss Gloria did no good by that first lie of her life, for the general's cigarette case had not yet left the keeping of Jenks, and in his contrition and his misery he confessed to the George the First teapot, the snuffbox, and the shooting stick. . . . He was tried, sentenced, and imprisoned. . . . But he sent back the silver ship to the old ladies with the request that they would keep it for him.

"The cheek!" said Miss Syringa through a tempest of tears. "The appalling cheek!"

"No," said Miss Gloria gently. "It just means that one day he will come back."

"He won't dare to come back!" stormed Miss Syringa.

"I hope so," said Miss Gloria, and she carried the silver ship upstairs and put it away in her long drawer under her best gray dress.

But Jenks did not come back. When the term of his imprisonment was over Miss Gloria expected him, but he did not come. Time passed, and the treasures in the shop slipped away one by one, taking each of them a little of the old ladies' vitality with them. . . . For they never ceased to love their possessions as their children, and they never ceased to ache and pine for the house on the hill.

It had fallen now into the hands of people who seemed not to

care for it at all. The beautiful garden was a mass of weeds, the paint cracked and dim, and many of the old rose-red tiles on the roof had slipped out of place. Miss Syringa never went to look at Harbour View now. . . . She could not bear to. . . . But Miss Gloria went often, moved by the instinct that makes one hang the portrait of someone dead upon the wall, the instinct of courage that places a sorrow where it can be faced and faced again, till the continual recognition of it breeds more courage.

She was returning from one of these visits on a summer evening. The sun had slipped away behind the distant hills but had left behind him a glory of soft molten gold that poured over the world like a benediction; a light less pitiless than that of the full sun, a kindly light that drew a veil over ugly details in street corners and revealed the beauty of old roofs against the sky and fishing boats sharp and black on the shining water. Miss Gloria paused in the High Street, just on the brow of the hill where she could see a bit of the estuary between the tumbling roofs of the houses above the harbor, a patch of water that shone like a sheet of gold hung between one roof and another. As she watched a little sailing ship drifted across it, making for home, its white sails seeming to her fancy to droop a little like those of a tired bird.

Miss Gloria turned away with a sigh and suddenly found herself staring at a glaring poster stuck up outside Brown's, the stationer's. "Sensational Surprise. White Wings Wins the Derby." Miss Gloria never looked at posters, for she thought them vulgar, and it is unlikely that she would have noticed this one had she not just been watching those other white wings crossing the golden sea, and even now she thought little of it.

"Dear me," she thought, "that will mean fortunes lost and won. How wicked this betting is. Dear me." And she went home.

Yet as she and Miss Syringa were eating their supper of bread and milk, with a few stewed prunes to follow, she said to Miss Syringa, "White Wings has won the Derby, dear."

"My dear Gloria," said Miss Syringa, "what's that to us? Betting is very wicked."

"Yes, dear," said Miss Gloria. "The sugar, dear, if you please."

That radiant summer was succeeded by a winter of bitter cold, and everything seemed to get too much for Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria. Their little house was damp, and they suffered from rheu-

matics. Then the shop was not going too well, for their stock was getting low and they had to buy to replenish it. Poverty pinched them hard, and they had to deny themselves the little comforts that meant so much to them. Miss Syringa cried incessantly, and her Roman nose became permanently red and her shoulders bowed. Miss Gloria remained the same, except for a slight deepening of the shadows under her eyes and a whitening of her hair, but then, said Miss Syringa petulantly, Gloria did not feel things as she did. Miss Gloria smiled at Miss Syringa's petulance and was glad that what she felt inside did not show outside; that had always been one of her objects in life; to have perfect control of the front she presented to the world.

But she had black moments in the middle of the night when she wondered for how much longer they would be able to carry on. She felt sometimes that ruin and decay were creeping upon them, as they were creeping over the house on the hill.

For Harbour View had been for sale for a long time now and no one seemed to want to buy it. It was old fashioned, of course, with inconvenient kitchen regions and no hot water laid on upstairs, and it fronted straight on the street, but even then Miss Gloria could not understand how anyone could resist the appeal of its old red roof and gracious bay windows and view of harbor and estuary.

Almost every day now she crept up to the old house and mourned over it; laying her hand upon the cracked front door as though in consolation and peering in through the dirty windowpanes at the empty parlor beyond. In her imagination she furnished it with the treasures that were now gone, the chairs and pictures and china, and saw herself and Miss Syringa sitting there as they used to do, dressed in lavender silk and pouring out tea from the George the First teapot that Jenks had stolen.

"Ah, Jenks!" thought Miss Gloria one shadowy evening, as she turned sadly away from the parlor window. "He has never come back. I fear I was mistaken in him."

The evening was so still that her sigh was audible and she herself, in her gray cloak, looked like a visible sigh, a small regretful ghost flitting in the shadows. She turned back for a last look through the window and then stole away, with many a backward glance of love and compassion. All that she felt about the house would have been perfectly obvious to any watcher.

And that particular night there was a watcher, a burly broad-shouldered man who had come up to look at the view and who stood just behind the bushes at the corner of the street. He was dressed

in a loud check suit a size too large for him and a bowler hat two sizes too small; the costume of a poor man who has come into money and who regards his clothes objectively, as possessions that would give him just as much pleasure under a glass case as upon his back, rather than subjectively in relation to himself. . . . He regarded Miss Gloria with fixed attention all the time she was there, and when she was gone he stood for a long time lost in thought, chewing the cud. It was quite dark when at last he came to, spat, and went down the hill for a drink at the Crab and Lobster.

## 8

It was not long after, on a night of wind and rain, that old Mr. Pepper came cantering up the High Street in his old fashioned ulster, with his scarlet muffler knotted around his throat and his large green carriage umbrella erected over his head; upon which, most incongruously, he wore his Sunday top hat. It was obvious that old Mr. Pepper was under the influence of strong excitement, for one end of his muffler trailed upon the ground and the wearing of his top hat upon a weekday, together with carpet slippers upon his feet on a wet night, was unlike Mr. Pepper. And the way that he flung himself upon the street door of the antique shop, thumping on it with his fists and kicking it with his carpet slippers, was also unlike him.

"My dear Mr. Pepper!" exclaimed Miss Gloria when she opened the door. "My dear young man!"

She stared in astonishment. Was Mr. Pepper drunk? Of course she knew this failing was sometimes to be met with in high-spirited young men, and she hoped she was a tolerant woman, but all the same. . . . She recoiled a little, and her legs shook beneath her.

Mr. Pepper pranced by her without a word, shedding his outer garments as he went, and disappeared into the parlor, his arrival being greeted by Miss Syringa with a small scream. Miss Gloria followed, having first picked up the discarded ulster, top hat, and scarf and hung them up on the pegs in the passage, for even in moments of dismay Miss Gloria had a tidy mind.

Back in the parlor she discovered that though Mr. Pepper had undoubtedly been celebrating some happy event with several glasses of his priceless old brandy, he was not so much drunk as wildly excited.

"My dear girls!" shouted Mr. Pepper, using a familiarity of address he had never yet presumed upon in all the years of their

acquaintance. "My dear girls, you have been left a fortune!"

Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria were incapable of speech; and Mr. Pepper flung himself into a chair, dragged toward him the little table upon which Miss Syringa had placed her knitting, spilled the knitting upon the floor, pulled out a bundle of papers from his pocket, and cast them before him on the table as though they were the entire contents of the Bank of England, and he Sir Montague Norman himself in an expansive mood.

"Scarcely a fortune, perhaps," he amended at the top of his voice. "But documents regarding the purchase of Harbour View, making it yours for life, and a nice fat annuity for the two of you!"

He brought both his hands down upon the documents with such a crash that the two old ladies leaped in their seats.

"Best bit of news I've had for many a day," boomed Mr. Pepper. "Congratulate you, my dear girls, congratulate you!" and jumping up he wrung the old ladies by the hand.

"But who? What?" gasped Miss Gloria, while Miss Syringa felt in her reticule for her smelling salts and swayed upon her chair.

"Here you are," said Mr. Pepper. "If you don't believe me, look for yourselves," and taking up a handful of papers in each hand he cast them upon their laps.

Neither of the old ladies had ever at any time been able to make head or tail of a document, and they could not do so now, but holding the papers in their shaking hands, and staring at them with blurred sight, they noticed that they had seals to them and were written in the beautiful clear writing that always seems to mock at the ambiguity of legal phrasing. . . . They were real things, not figments of the imagination.

"But who?" gasped Miss Gloria again.

"A friend," said Mr. Pepper. "Just a friend who wishes to remain anonymous for the present." And he took a large pinch of snuff to clear his head and sneezed triumphantly and gloriously.

Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria had no very clear idea as to how the rest of the evening passed. They signed their names on the documents where Mr. Pepper's pointing finger directed, and at his suggestion they opened the very last bottle of the Admiral's claret and joined him in just a thimbleful each, drunk out of three ruby Bristol glasses, all that was left now out of the set of a dozen. At least Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria drank just a thimbleful each, but Mr. Pepper obligingly finished the bottle. . . . "By way of celebration, dear girls. . . ." And so happy was he that the tears stood in his eyes.

But the evening was over at last, and the old ladies found themselves in bed, lying with their nightcapped heads upon the pillows and their eyes staring into the dark.

"It can't be true," murmured Miss Syringa.

"It is quite true," said Miss Gloria. Now that she had really taken in what had happened, she found that she was not in the least surprised. She had always expected the Unexpected to happen. In her very darkest hour she had never lost her belief that in the drab weave of life there runs a gold thread of fairy-tale magic. You may see it or you may not see it, but it is there.

"We still have three of the Bristol glasses," said Miss Syringa out of the darkness.

"And the Rockingham lambs," said Miss Gloria.

"And one of the Chelsea figures," said Miss Syringa. "The one with the pansies on her petticoat."

"And the silver ship," said Miss Gloria softly.

"But who is this friend?" asked Miss Syringa for the hundredth time.

"I don't know, dear," said Miss Gloria.

But here she told her second lie, for she knew quite well.

9

"Ye see, mum," said Jenks, "when I saw there was an 'orse running called White Wings I 'ad to back it. . . . It was an Omen. . . . I remembered the white wings bobbing on the estuary, mum, an' the white wings of your pretty ship. I put my last bob on the 'orse."

The spring sunshine was pouring in through the bow window and flooding the parlor at Harbour View. The room had been repainted and papered, and if it was more sparsely furnished than in the old days, there was not a thing in it, from the Rockingham lambs on the mantelpiece to the silver ship on the table by the window, that was not beautiful.

And Miss Syringa and Miss Gloria, in new lavender silk, looked beautiful too, for their happiness illumined them with a radiance that was almost wonderful. Mr. Herbert Jenks, who was drinking tea with them, could perhaps hardly be described as a beautiful figure, but in his loud check suit, with a bunch of primroses in his buttonhole and a large green handkerchief tucked under his gray fringe of beard to protect his mustard-colored waistcoat, he was nevertheless a sight to gladden the eyes. . . . In himself he had not changed at all; he was just as he used to be, sturdy and strong and

cheery, with his eyes under their bushy brows so like the Admiral's and his heart as young as ever it was. There would have been no shadow upon the old ladies' joy had it not been that they appeared to owe their prosperity to the evil of betting.

"But Jenks," quavered Miss Syringa, "betting is very wicked."

"Yes, mum," said Jenks, pouring his tea into his saucer and absorbing it loudly and happily. "And now that I've made my little pile I ain't goin' to 'ave no more to do with it."

"That's right, Jenks," said Miss Gloria approvingly. "Take another piece of plum cake and tell us all about it."

"When I come out of quod, mum," said Jenks, "I 'ad a bad time."

"Dear! Dear!" sighed the old ladies.

"I 'ad to take to the road again, mum, I 'ad indeed, an' I'd be there now but for a bit of luck I 'ad."

"Luck?" queried the old ladies.

"Yes, mum. A picnic party was 'aving a bit of a beano beside the road, someone's birthday I shouldn't wonder, with bottles of beer to celebrate it, an' when they went off in their car I just 'ad a look to see if they'd left any fags be'ind, an' there, mum, lying in the bracken as modest as you please, was a fine gold-mounted leather case with ten quid in it."

"Quid?" queried Miss Syringa.

"Yes, mum. Ten pounds. That was the beginning of my luck, mum."

"But Jenks," said Miss Gloria in horror, "you should have taken the case to the police station."

"There weren't no police station, mum, not within ten miles."

"Then, Jenks, you should have left the case where it was."

"I did, mum," said Jenks indignantly. "I'm not the man to steal a gold-mounted leather case. I've turned over a new leaf, I 'ave, since I came out of quod."

"But—" said Miss Gloria, bewildered.

"But I didn't leave the ten quid in the case, mum," said Jenks, and lowered his eyes modestly as he took a large bite of plum cake.

"Yes, mum," he went on, since the old ladies seemed incapable of speech. "And so I took to putting a bit on an 'orse 'ere an' there, an' it was wonderful 'ow the money came rolling in. There seemed, mum," said Jenks solemnly, "a blessing on all I did."

The old ladies shook their heads in some distress of spirit, but Jenks went imperturbably on.

"An' when I saw White Wings was runnin' in the Derby, I put the 'ole blinkin' lot on 'im, even though 'e weren't the favorite, not



by any means. . . . It was an Omen, mum."

"Yes?" queried Miss Syringa faintly.

"An' after that, mum, I went on winning steady. I 'ad my losses now an' again, o'course, but they weren't nothin' to what I gained. I vowed to meself, mum, that I wouldn't leave off till I'd got enough cash to—to—" He paused and his eyes met those of Miss Gloria. "To show ye, mum, as I wouldn't never forget that lie ye told for me at the police station."

His voice turned suddenly husky, and whipping his green handkerchief from his mustard-colored waistcoat he blew a trumpet blast upon his nose to hide his emotion. . . . But over the top of the handkerchief his eyes again met Miss Gloria's and he tipped her the suspicion of a wink. . . . And she smiled back, for she was not offended; how should she be when there was between them that bond that links the ever-young-at-heart to whom life never ceases to be magical?

"But I do hope, Jenks," broke in Miss Syringa somewhat severely, "that your—er—thieving—is a thing of the past?"

"Yes, mum," said Jenks. "I've seen the error of my ways. I'm going back to Yarmouth way, where I come from. I've purchased a share in as smart a little fishing boat as ye ever saw, mum. Part owner of'er I am."

"That's right, Jenks," said Miss Gloria. "That's what you always wanted."

"Yes, mum," said Jenks. "And now it's to be 'oped I'll keep straight. . . . I always did say, mum, that there ain't no difficulty in it once ye get what you want."

When he had gone, the old ladies sat for some time in silence, partly rapturous, partly uneasy.

"It seems to me, Gloria," said Miss Syringa at last, "that we are living upon the wages of sin."

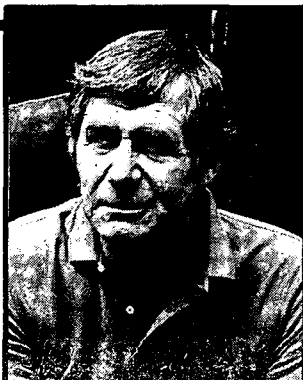
Miss Gloria glanced round her at the lovely sun-lit room, at the bright wood fire in the grate, at the soft folds of lavender silk that billowed round the leisured, rested bodies of herself and her sister Syringa, at the Rockingham lambs prancing on the mantelpiece and the precious silver ship sailing before a fair wind, and her mouth curved in a roguish smile.

"Yes, dear," she said. "But never mind."

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Mary Vann Hunter



ED McBAIN

**I**t's that time of year when folks from northern climes start planning to flock (in chartered flights) to Florida. If you can't afford to join this winter's migration, I have a suggestion. Head (in your armchair) for Calusa on Florida's Gulf Coast. There you can bask in the sunshine, revel in balmy breezes, and dip into sparkling swimming pools and crystal cocktail glasses. You can also try your hand at murder investigation because Calusa is the setting of Ed McBain's most recent series of murder mysteries and home to his newest protagonist, Matthew Hope.

Lawyer Matthew Hope may be new to you, but his creator should be no stranger. McBain has long been appreciated for

his 87th Precinct novels. (*Ice* was recently reviewed in this column.) McBain also writes novels under his real name, Evan Hunter, and is credited with more than sixty novels to date.

The books in this series are linked by recurring cast members and by theme, as the titles make clear. The fairy tale motif is a clever one, while the means used to involve Hope (who's not a criminal lawyer) in each case are equally imaginative. *Goldilocks*, which opened the series, is the nickname given to Dr. Jamie Purchase's younger second wife, by the embittered woman who was the first Mrs. Purchase. When the college-age son from that first marriage confesses to the brutal stabbing

deaths of his stepmother and two baby stepsisters, the sneering nickname takes on a new and sinister meaning. The motive, finally revealed, is rooted in a mind twisted during childhood, one that distorted love and loyalty just as this murder mystery distorts a beloved fairy tale.

Children play an important role in two more novels. *Rumpelstiltskin* places Hope in the position of suspect when a woman he's been dating is stabbed and her six-year-old daughter apparently abducted. The "gold" in this version of the fairy tale may be a twelve-million-dollar trust fund, money the murdered woman earned when she was a teen rock star. Or it may be the fame she'd had and then lost, the fame she'd been trying to recapture—with a sadly modest appearance at a local Calusa nightclub—when she died. To Hope, the treasure is the missing child whom he seeks, fearing for her life. Like the dead Goldilocks, she is another "innocent," trapped in a fairy tale turned nightmare.

*Jack and the Beanstalk* opens when young Jack McKinney hires Hope to close a land deal for him. Against Matt's advice, Jack insists that he plans to grow beans on the land, regardless of Matt's research showing this is a no-go proposition. Furthermore, Jack maintains that

he has forty thousand dollars in cash in readiness for the transaction. When young McKinney is found murdered days later, there's no trace of the money. As Jack's lawyer, Hope meets the boy's beautiful mother and his thrill-seeking sister. The ungrieving mother begins to look more and more like the queen in Snow White. And the "beans" dreamed of by the dumb, unloved Jack begin to look like something quite different, too.

*Beauty and the Beast*, though, is peopled by adults, unless you can count the childish, naive George N. Harper, the huge black man accused of horribly torturing and killing his lovely blonde wife. Certainly Matt believes Harper to be the "innocent," and the lies he's told by George's alleged friends make him even more certain. But another woman is murdered before Hope gets the full picture, and a storybook picture it is not.

Using commonplace bedtime stories as his starting place, McBain has fashioned four immensely entertaining and sophisticated novels. I dearly hope he has the complete works of Mother Goose and the Brothers Grimm in his home library, so he may never run-out of ideas for his Matthew Hope series.

(*Goldilocks* was published in hardcover by Arbor House, *Rumpelstiltskin* by Viking,

and the most recent two by Holt, Rinehart and Winston.)

## MYSTERY REVIEWS

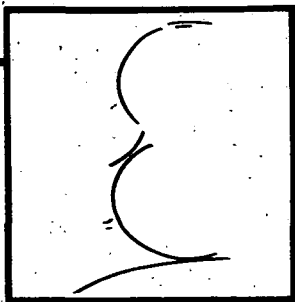
**Ceremony of Innocence** (Walker and Company, \$12.95, 196 pp.) is the pseudonymous S.F.X. Dean's latest mystery featuring American professor Neil Kelly. Kelly arrives in England—belatedly, but there at last—to begin a sabbatical. A fortuitous meeting with an Englishman he once knew brings back a flood of memories about Kelly's boyhood, when the two as youths spent many happy hours in pre-Revolutionary China, where their fathers worked. Kelly stands up as godfather to his friend's newborn son, and begins work on his own scholarly book. Then, as in a bad dream, the baby is brutally murdered. Worse, the appearance of another boyhood chum, a man now attached to the Chinese legation in London, gives Kelly the feeling that he, in some inexplicable way, was the catalyst of the tragedy. This is another outstanding entry by Dean, a book with real people, strong writing, and heartfelt emotion.

**The Shadow of the Moth**, by Ellen Hawkes and Peter Manso, is a very special mystery. Starring Virginia Woolf, and populated by the likes of Vanessa Bell, Duncan Wood, John Maynard Keynes, and that crowd, *Shadow* captures the flavor of London's literary and political circles in 1917. Virginia herself is recuperating from a breakdown and suicide attempt, and chafing under the too-watchful eye of her husband Leonard, when she sees a small newspaper article. A Belgian refugee has drowned herself; a note pinned to her breast reads, "No-Father, No Mother, No Work." The plaintive lines strike a chord in Virginia; her search for more information about the death leads her to team up with a brash young American reporter; and the two women begin a deadly investigation. There are action and suspense here, but it's the moving and carefully-wrought portrait of Virginia Woolf—not only as others see her, but as she saw herself—that makes this mystery so richly entertaining. (Penguin Books, \$3.50, 280 pp.)

Jean Kaiser was a teenager, lying awake on a summer night many years ago, when someone entered the house and butchered her sleeping parents. Now she's a psychologist, divorced, successful enough to have a radio call-in program, happy to be the mother of her own teenage daughter. But suddenly a voice threatens her during her radio show . . . The killer who spared her life so many years before seems determined to correct his error. There are some hair-raising scenes before the surprising identity of the murderer is revealed. This is Stuart Kaminsky's **When the Dark Man Calls** (Avon \$2.95, 237 pp.). Don't begin it at bedtime.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**T**he murder in **A Soldier's Story** takes place in 1944 at a segregated army training camp for black soldiers. Sent from Washington to investigate is one Captain Davenport, the first black officer anyone on the base has ever seen. For different reasons the white officers and black soldiers alike throw obstacles in Davenport's way because of his race. In order for him to solve the mystery, he has to set aside his disgust with racially motivated behavior, lest his better instincts keep him from the truth.

A black sergeant had gone drinking in the segregated bar located in the nearby little town of Tymin, Louisiana. Anyone in this Ku Klux Klan stronghold could have beaten and shot him as he staggered drunkenly along the road back to the base. So might the two white army captains whom he insulted on his

way, and who eventually admit to having beaten him up. But it develops that the sergeant had also given virtually every one of his recruits a reason for hating him.

As Davenport questions the men, he comes to realize that the victim was himself a racist bully. The sergeant was a man who had decided to make a place for himself in the white world by rigid adherence to duty and rigidly controlled behavior. He had it in for any fellow black who acted differently toward the white man and, more than anything else, opposed easygoing, self-denigrating compliance. One recruit in particular had these characteristics, and as a result he came to obsess the sergeant.

The young man in question was a talented musician, the best player on the soldiers' virtually professional baseball team, and much beloved by all

who came in contact with him. In the sergeant's eyes, though, he was a disgrace to the entire black race and had to be eliminated.



Howard Rollins in *A Soldier's Story*.

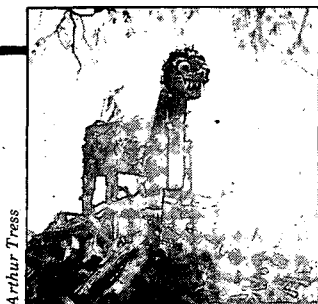
The sergeant's irrational hatred seems to be modeled on Herman Melville's novel, *Billy Budd*, in which a ship's officer sets out to destroy a young sailor of surpassing physical beauty and innocence. Both Billy Budd and the young soldier become sacrificial victims. But in *A Soldier's Story* one feels almost equal sympathy for the soldier and for his nemesis, the sergeant who drives him to suicide. The sergeant himself, after all, is a product of racial pressures.

*A Soldier's Story* is director Norman Jewison's adaptation of the New York Negro Ensemble Company's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Soldier's Play*, by playwright Charles Fuller. Jewison also directed the 1967 Academy Award-winning *In the Heat of the Night*, with Sidney

Poitier and Rod Steiger. In that movie, too, a black investigator has to control his emotions if he is to overcome the obstacles thrown in his way by racism. Sidney Poitier's icily dignified handling of himself in the closed society of an isolated southern town seems to have been the model for Howard E. Rollins, Jr.'s performance as Captain Davenport in *A Soldier's Story*. Like Poitier, Rollins moves and speaks with controlled precision. And Rollins smoothes his uniform with the same care that kept Poitier looking natty in his northerner's fitted suit no matter how many times he got pushed around in *In the Heat of the Night*.

Despite their outward self control, the inspectors in both movies feel the stings of prejudice and are tempted to look for the murderer where racial hatred is at its worst. Instead, Captain Davenport needs a clinical knowledge of precisely how racial prejudice affects both bigots and their victims. In the end, Davenport realizes that the killer is someone who has been so driven—to the point of doing away with the sergeant. As the investigation closes in on the killer, it grows clear that he acted with a high rather than a low motive. But in the end the moral proves to be that premeditated murder can never be justified.

# THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Tress

The July Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Harry V. Beck of Tucson, Arizona. Honorable mentions go to Robert Loy of Summerville, South Carolina; Victor L. Warzinski of Colliers, West Virginia; Peter Gray of Brampton, Ontario, Canada; Don Shaffer of San Mateo, California; Jane O'Byrne of Lemoore, California; James Wasnieski of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania; Elaine Lowery of San Antonio, Texas; T. S. Bank of New York, New York; Nancy Snead Kelsch of Newark, Delaware; Elizabeth Doyle of Tres Pinos, California; Gil Anderson of Barstow, California; Jonathan Lowe of Greenville, South Carolina; Jon Atwood of Lakewood, Colorado; and Richard Ciciarelli of Phelps, New York.

## THE GREEK'S MYTH-TAKE by Harry V. Beck

"You did well, my son," Hector said as he patted Ascanius affectionately on the shoulders. "Furthermore, I bring you good news from the king. You are hereby promoted to Captain of the Palace Guard."

"Thank you, sir," Ascanius said modestly.

"But, tell me," Hector continued, "how did you so quickly discern the enemy's trickery?"

"Quite simple," Ascanius answered. "My mother always said, 'Beware of Greeks bearing gifts,' so my suspicions were immediately aroused when I saw the thing sitting there on the beach. Now, the Greek C.I.A. is very good and correctly guessed King Priam would welcome a gift to Athena. What they didn't know was that all those stories read to him as a child had made him frightfully fearful of dragons. It was then that I ordered the contraption dragged to that grove of trees and torched."

"Excellent," Hector exclaimed. "But, tell me, what would you have done, say, had it been a horse?"

"Oh," said Ascanius, "my father always said, 'Never look a gift horse in the mouth.' I would probably have quickly accepted the gift of a Trojan horse and towed it immediately into the city."



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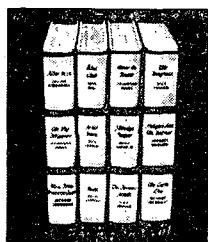
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sleds, thanks for park benches  
and gymnasium floors, thanks  
for fruits and jams and jellies,  
thanks for shade for a Sunday  
afternoon nap, and a special

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breathe. Trees give us a lot.  
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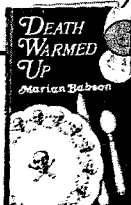
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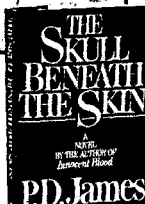
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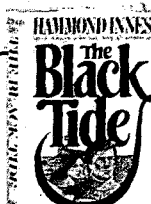
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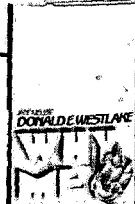
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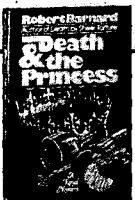
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